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# Making Sense of Nature: A Creative Exploration of Young People's Relationship with the Natural Environment

Tracy Ann Hayes

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
University of Cumbria Graduate School, Lancaster University.

February 2017

# **“Making Sense of Nature”**

## **A Creative Exploration of Young People’s Relationship with the Natural**

### **Environment**

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February 2017

Word Count: 78,342 words <sup>i</sup>

### **Abstract**

Can you imagine a world where no-one goes outside? Our world is under threat from human activities, from what we do, and the way we do it. This will have a huge impact on our future lives, and we need to think about how we protect places and the people, animals and plants found there. Whilst, there is a widely-recognised need to address this threat, there is a specific focus on how we can involve young people in this process. Within this, there is additional concern about how little time children and young people spend outside. My qualitative study responds to these concerns by exploring young people’s relationship with nature, and how this may be developed through the projects we offer them. The participating projects have been spread across England, from south-east to north-west, including rural, coastal and urban environments. The young people, aged between 11 and 25, were from diverse backgrounds, with a wide range of individual needs. This transdisciplinary research has used an innovative blended methodology, combining hermeneutics,

(auto)ethnography and action research (HEAR) to explore the topic. I have been creative in my approach, preferring everyday language and making use of stories. I have listened to and observed people's stories, and created new stories based on these experiences. My work emphasises the importance of communication, how we talk to and with people, and how we talk about the natural environment. Contributions to practice include the development of a new toolkit providing guidance for practitioners on how to work effectively outdoors, with young people identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Contributions to knowledge include a new conceptualisation of the different forms of story, and a new methodological approach (HEAR) to explore outdoor learning experiences. These outcomes are founded in young peoples' perspectives and grounded in practice.

(299 words)

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## Acknowledgements

A writer's voice is often composed of many voices, which the writer brings together in a conversation. The writer's voice emerges in the way she calls on all the voices and combines them in making an overall statement. To identify the dominant voice of any text, as readers we need to hear distinctly all the voices that the writer calls on. (Bazerman, 1995, p.89)

As the author of this thesis my voice assumes a privileged position, however it is a reflection and composition of the many voices I have encountered, far too many to thank individually. There are some voices I have called on most often, and relied on to support me during my most challenging times. This is the place where they are named: some directly and distinctly citing their role; others to respect their anonymity, by first name only. Firstly, I gratefully acknowledge Faber and Faber Ltd for permission to include within my thesis, an extract from Jo Shapcott's poem 'Unravelled'.

- ♥ To all the young people who have shared my world – to all those I have spent time with, but most of all, those who have survived my parenting – Jason, Suzie, Daniel and Joe - I thank you for your generosity and love. Nick, Kate and Ethan – I thank you for helping me to see the world from another perspective and to understand the need for kindness.
- ♥ To all the practitioners who have shared my world, most especially Anne, Felicity, Lorna, Judy, Jacqui, Laura, Neil, Nathan, Pete, Kate, Claire, Lucy, Kate, Wendy, Penny, James – I thank you for your wisdom and patience when working alongside me.
- ♥ Kate I., Sara W., Julie S., Chris L., Diane, Sonia, Caroline, Emma and Dave – I thank you for your guidance and encouragement to believe in myself.
- ♥ Kaz Stuart, I thank you coming alongside me at a time when I felt lost, and for helping me to see my way forward.

- ♥ Julie Taylor, I thank you for believing in me, for showing me how my stories can be pervasive and bring about change, and for introducing me to the work of Arthur W. Frank. His work will inform my post-doctoral development.
- ♥ My primary supervisor Heather Prince – I thank you for taking a chance with me, for your ability to allow me my freedom whilst keeping a watchful eye on the 'boundary', taking care to ensure I did not stray too far from my intended path and remembered to cross the T's and dot the I's.
- ♥ My parents, Derek and Sheila, parents-in-law, Norman and Alma and my siblings, Stephen, Martin and Fiona – I thank you for my childhood, for the way it continues to inform and shape my life.
- ♥ My husband Ian – this is where words fail me. You know how I feel, that is enough.

Their words are interwoven throughout this thesis, accompanied by carefully chosen voices from literature. Please listen carefully, as readers you need to listen to all the voices I have called on. Without them I have nothing to say.

The picture below was painted by Freya Pocklington,<sup>1</sup> and formed part of her exhibition 'Women's Work', which was the outcome of a three-month Dorothy Una Radcliffe Fellowship residency at Acorn Bank, Cumbria, in Spring 2016. The 2016 Fellowship was part of the National Trust's programme of activities celebrating 150 years since Beatrix Potter's birth. This was on public display from 2nd September to 27th November 2016, with an audio recording of me reading a story (number 23 in my accompanying storybook) and links to my research.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on her work, please see <http://freypocklington.com/>



**Image 1: My Inner and Outer Wolves**

**Note:** The image is used here to exemplify my creative approach to the topic and to set the tone for this thesis. The lightbulb above my head represents the ‘aha’ moments of inspiration during my research. The foreground pictures are a mix of dissecting rabbits (natural science), sewing machine and teddy bear ‘skins’, ready for sewing (creative interpretation), my first toy, a yellow elephant (reflections and memories), a book that was one of my daughter’s favourites from her childhood and was also the artist’s favourite (shared anecdote) and a jar of insects (practical application).

Freya, thank you for so creatively capturing my ‘wildness’ without words, in picture form to share with others. I love it, it is so *me*.

Tracy Hayes, Newton Reigny, Penrith, Cumbria.

Date: February/October 2017

# PART ONE: OPENING THE CONVERSATION

## Welcome

...Then she says  
don't you  
ever want to go to market and get lost  
in pots, fruit and random fabric? Don't you  
want to experiment with rain, hide out in  
storms,  
cover your body with a layer only one  
raindrop  
thick? Don't you want to sell your nail-  
clippings  
online? She says, look at you, with all your  
language,  
you never became the flower your mother  
wanted but it's not too late, come with me  
and rootle in the earth outside my front  
window...  
(Shapcott, 2010, p.28)

Welcome to my thesis, 'Making Sense of Nature: A Creative Exploration of Young People's Relationship with the Natural Environment', which I present to you in storied form. I feel it is appropriate to explain my alternative, creative approach at the start of my thesis, as this written work reflects many years of 'rootling in the earth outside', followed by ruminating on my experiences inside, often whilst getting 'lost in fabric'. I am not conducting/writing a 'Creative Writing' PhD. I am not an Arts or Humanities student. I am creatively transdisciplinary in how I conduct my work (research process) and how I interpret my findings (research outputs). Like Ingold (2000, pp.1-2) I have sought out ways to close the gap between natural sciences and arts/humanities, and to cross the divide that '...separates the 'two worlds' of humanity and nature'. My work is creatively presented, as shown with

the image at the start and with the storybook and teddy bears that complement this thesis,<sup>2</sup> so that the presentation reflects the contents. This has the explicit aim of encouraging participation and critical thinking. I invite you to join with me, to read my words, and then to consider your own experiences within and with nature, before responding to my final question, “How do you make sense of nature?”

The quote with which I start my written thesis, is an extract from a poem by Jo Shapcott, titled ‘Somewhat Unravelled’.<sup>3</sup> At times whilst conducting my research and writing this thesis, I too have felt unravelled, sometimes because I have chosen to unravel and expose my thoughts (see Appendix ii: *Methodological Mud Wrestling*; conference abstract, p.318); other times have been less of my choosing (see Chapter 5, pp.129-143). What I present here is a critical re-ravelling and interweaving of my thoughts and experiences, together with relevant theory and literature.

### **My thesis is presented in three parts**

- Part One: This section uses three chapters to introduce my research by opening the conversation to lead the reader in.<sup>4</sup> I provide the background and context of my research, and demonstrate the overall unity of approaches I have taken and the key themes I have explored. The first chapter introduces my research, placing it within its immediate research context with a concise review of

---

<sup>2</sup> Examples available on my website, URL: [www.makingsenseofnature.co.uk](http://www.makingsenseofnature.co.uk)

<sup>3</sup> As identified in the acknowledgements, I have written permission from the copyright holder to include this within my PhD thesis.

<sup>4</sup> This refers to the ‘Opening Out Model’ for structuring a PhD explained by Dunleavy, P. (2003) *Authoring a PhD: How to plan, Draft, Write, and Finish a Doctoral Thesis or Dissertation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave)

relevant literature. The second chapter explains my methodology, how this was informed by my fieldwork, and shaped by my encounters with young people. The third chapter presents the core of my primary research.

- Part Two: My research tales. This section is presented in nine chapters, including papers prepared for publication, each with their own specific focus and sharing their own story. They have all been subject to peer-review,<sup>5</sup> either through presentation and critical dialogue at a conference, within a higher education teaching session, or through publication as a book chapter, journal article or practitioner publication. It has been formatted following guidance for Alternative Format PhDs.<sup>6</sup>
- Part Three: This section provides discursive analysis and connects (interweaves) my research discoveries with relevant literature, and takes it back into practice, together with a summary of my achievements. My thesis closes with suggestions to lead the reader out of the conversation, with an indication of my future research plans.

---

<sup>5</sup> My peers include both academics and practitioners.

<sup>6</sup> For more information on this format, please see:

<https://gap.lancs.ac.uk/ASQ/QAE/MARP/Documents/PGr-Assess-Regs.pdf> Last Viewed 24/11/2016.



## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This chapter introduces my research: it explains the topic and title for my research, defines the key terms I have used, and outlines my research aims and questions. I then relate this to current knowledge by providing an overview of the sources being examined, and begin to explore the context and background to the research. There is an initial reflection on my position within the research, and my rationale for, and defence of, the conversational approach I have taken to present this written thesis. This includes my use of everyday, ordinary terms, and the inclusion of anecdotes, memories and ‘magic moments’ which I take care to explain and justify. The chapter comes to a close with a summary of the expected implications and outcomes of my research.

### **My topic of focus**

My research explores young people’s relationship with nature, and embraces a creative approach, based on the use of story. The key terms I have identified within my study are: nature/natural; relationship; young people; creative/creativity; exploration; making sense; story/storytelling/storied. I start by considering how each of the key terms is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) before moving on to a more critical discussion of how this is applied in the context of my study. The OED claims to be

‘... widely regarded as the accepted authority on the English language. It is an unsurpassed guide to the meaning, history, and pronunciation of 600,000 words— past and present—from across the English-speaking world’ (Oxford English Dictionary (OED), 2017, non-paginated).

The version I have primarily used is the printed Oxford *Essential* English Dictionary (OED, 2011, my italics) as this was created with a specific focus on contemporary words and meanings ‘...explained in straightforward language...’ (Ibid., 2011, p.v). I acknowledge there are contested/disputed perspectives amongst academics in respect of the applicability of dictionary definitions to research and specialist areas. However, I have found it a useful tool for defining everyday language by providing a starting point, before then moving on to contextualise how each term is applied within my research.

## **Nature**

This is such a small word and yet it encompasses so much, and is highly contested, indeed, even my use of it in this conventional singular form, is contentious. As eloquently and persuasively argued by Affrica Taylor (2013, p.4) this conventional usage represents a romanticised, ‘seductive’ view. In her book, she provides an in-depth discussion of the etymology of the word ‘nature’, which she deconstructs and reconstructs in the plural form ‘natures’. However, as she identifies, it is not easy to reconstruct our relationship to nature ‘...without making a sizeable conceptual and difficult emotional shift’ (Ibid., p.115). I am intrigued by her argument, and yet I question its usefulness, in a practical sense, within the context of this study. The paradigmatic shift needed feels a step too far for me, taking me away from the application used in everyday language as recognised and used by the participants in my study. Therefore, I am choosing to continue with the conventional usage of the

singular nature, rather than the reconstructed ‘... natureculture common worlds’ (Ibid., p.115) represented by the plural natures that she suggests.<sup>7</sup>

Starting with the dictionary definition, the OED (Ibid., p.388) defines it as ‘the world with all its features and living things’. Furthermore, the OED confidently asserts that nature is ‘...distinct from things made by humans’. Does that imply humans are not natural? Do we not make each other? Is that not the basic premise of procreation, the ‘natural process of reproduction’ (OED, 2011, p.460)? Seeing humans as *separate*, and in many cases, *above* and *in control* of nature is arguably the main tenet behind the concept of dis/connection to nature. Whilst grappling with defining nature, I asked an academic colleague what the term meant to him, resulting in an intriguing dialogue which I present as an anecdote:

#### ***Anecdote 1: What is Nature?***

Him (his quick, unthinking response as he hadn’t been expecting this question, nor had time to prepare for it): “It’s outside.”

Me: “Only outside?”

Him: “Yes.”

Me: “So that tree, outside the window, is that nature.”

Him: “Yes. Because it hasn’t been made by man.”

Me: “But it was placed there by man, someone planted it.”

Him: “Maybe, but they didn’t make it in the first place.”

Me: “What about if a branch falls off, and lands on the ground, is that still nature?”

Him: “Yes. It’s still part of the tree, not made by man.”

Me: “How about if I pick up the branch, and bring it indoors, is that still nature.”

---

<sup>7</sup> However, I am intrigued by her arguments, and intend to explore this further in my post-doctoral research.

Him: "No, because it's indoors. That's not natural."

Me: "But it's the same branch, still not made by humans..."

Him: "But now it's indoors, nature didn't put it there, you did."

Me: "What if I hold it half-way through the door, part in, part out...?"

Him "Part of it will be natural, the other bit not."

Me: "Ok, so what about you, do you see yourself as part of nature?"

Him: "Only when I'm outdoors. When I'm indoors, I feel separate. I feel unnatural."

Me: "What about if you have one leg in, one leg out...? And what about the rest of you? Where would your hands be? What about your brain? And what is it that changes when you step across the threshold? What is the significance of what we are saying? Does it matter...?"

At this point in the conversation, we both admitted defeat (in case you were wondering, by this point my colleague's hands were over his ears) at attempting to find a mutually agreeable definition for the term nature. However, the anecdote shared here serves to emphasise the challenges inherent in defining it as an applicable concept for a research project, as opposed to seeing it as a word used in everyday language that has been defined by a reputable dictionary. It illustrates the importance of *how* it is applied to understand the lived experience of everyday life, what is inferred in this application, how it is perceived by those using it, and the underlying morals and values contained within it.

Like Affrica Taylor, Noel Castree has spent many years defining nature which he describes as 'Promiscuous in its meanings and referents...' (2005, p.xiii) whilst talking openly of the challenges involved in finding a '*...parsimonious* means of presenting ideas, insights and arguments' (2005, p.xiii, my emphasis added in italics) which for him resulted in a six-chapter book titled 'Nature' (Ibid.). He then moved

on to write a nine-chapter book, 'Making Sense of Nature' (2013) in which he asserts:

Nature is one of the most widely talked about and investigated things there is [...] Nature continues to be understood in a multitude of ways, many of them incompatible. Indeed, the struggle to get a 'proper' understanding of nature is one of the defining struggles of any era. (Ibid., p.xvii).

Within the endnote, he further explains 'Why we still need to talk about nature' (2013, pp.318-325), by highlighting that 'nature' is not natural by nature, but by ascription: 'What exists is not 'nature' but the myriad of things we, by convention, attach this label to' (Ibid., p.319). Like him, I am interested in the way this thing we call nature is made intelligible to us (for example, through facilitated programmes and communications), and how we experience/make sense of it. So, to me the branch in the anecdote above, is natural (representative of nature), whether it is viewed indoors or outdoors. I assert this, whilst concurrently also respecting my colleague's alternative perspective that this differs depending on the context in which it is found. Both are appropriate and subjective interpretations/applications of the word. As Soper (1995, p.2) reminds us, it is important to remain alert to the '...immensely complex and contradictory symbolic load' carried by the word nature. This 'load' is fraught with tautologies and contradictions, and comprises philosophical, moral/ethical, biological, spiritual, social, cultural, economic and political constructions. Indeed, in recent times, as Soper (Ibid.) also highlights, in the westernised world, 'nature' has become a central issue on both economic and political agenda(s), attributed to growing awareness of ecological crises (Soper, Ibid.).

Proctor (1998) provides an in-depth critique of the many different ways to understand the concept of nature, and schools of academic thought, focusing on social construction, relativism and pragmatism. Although I respect those who believe that 'Nature is nothing if it is not social' (Smith, 1990, cited in Proctor, *Ibid.*, p.352), I disagree with the social constructivism stance implicit in this statement. I have come to this topic through my concern for the natural world, and I agree with Proctor that the social construction of nature argument '... strikes to the epistemological core of environmentalism's moral and political campaign' (*Ibid.*, p.353). Yet, I cannot embrace a stance that sees the world as something that is out there, and scientifically measurable – it is more than this. As I explain in Chapter 2 (p.37), I take a critical realist approach that bridges these alternative perspectives in a practical and useful manner for exploring and understanding my topic.

Therefore, returning to its everyday usage, accepting the OEED definition serves a useful purpose within my thesis. It effectively marks an important distinction between that which we perceive as urban/industrial/artificial/man-made and what we perceive as natural. This is how the term 'nature' is used by the participants within my study. Applying this definition '...makes discriminations that we would want to observe between different types of space and human uses of it' (Soper, *Ibid.*, p.20). It allows us to refer to specific spaces as nature parks, nature walks, the natural environment, in full awareness of the 'theoretical laxity' and 'conceptual imprecision of ordinary talk of nature' (Soper, *Ibid.*, p.20). This is also the definition seen most often within the language and literature of British environmental organisations, as shown in the examples below:

- National Trust: Our strategy focuses on the restoration of a healthy **natural** environment on which the health of **nature** and society's well-being depends. Our vision is for land and landscape that is healthy, rich in **nature** and culture, beautiful and enjoyable – and productive as a result (National Trust, 2016, p.17, my emphasis added in bold).
- The Wildlife Trusts (TWT): The Wildlife Trusts want to help **nature** to recover from the decline that for decades has been the staple diet of scientific studies and news stories. We believe passionately that wildlife and **natural** processes need to have space to thrive, beyond designated **nature** reserves and other protected sites. To achieve this, it is vital that the richest wildlife sites are protected and sustained as a starting point from which **nature** can spread back into our wider landscapes (TWT, 2016: non-paginated, my emphasis added in bold).
- RSPB: The RSPB's long-term vision is set out in our strategy document: Saving **Nature**: a statement of the RSPB's strategic intent to 2020 [...] our four strategic objectives:
  - I. A world richer in **nature**
  - II. Growing support for **nature**
  - III. Excelling at **nature** conservation
  - IV. *One team for **nature*** (RSPB, 2015, p.6, my emphasis added in bold).

In 2013, RSPB joined forces with 24 other conservation organisations to launch the 'State of Nature' report. This report was repeated in 2016, and now acknowledges the contributions of '... data and expertise from more than 50 nature conservation and other research organisations to give a

cutting edge overview of the state of nature in the UK and in its seas, Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories'.<sup>8</sup>

'Nature' is the term commonly used within governmental reports, and in reports on these by reputable media sources. For example, as reported by the Guardian newspaper, 'Nature provides economic and health benefits of about £30bn a year, according to a 2011 government analysis'.<sup>9</sup> In recognition of how the term is applied by these organisations, and since my fieldwork involves observations of, and participation in everyday life, I am therefore choosing to apply the OEED definitions in my thesis:

**Nature:** '1: the world with all its features and living things, as distinct from things made by humans; 2: the physical force regarded as producing living things' (OEED, op.cit., p.388).

**Natural:** 'produced or done by nature, not by people or machines' (OEED, op.cit., p.388).

For consistency, I will continue this approach to define the other key terms I have used within my study. My approach will only differ when the word I am defining has an inherently academic/theoretical/philosophical basis. I take care to explain *how* I have applied these terms, however I am consciously avoiding specifying how they should be used by others, as this is a subjective and personal choice.

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<sup>8</sup> Available, URL: [http://www.theecologist.org/News/news\\_analysis/2988125/state\\_of\\_nature\\_2016\\_report\\_shows\\_continued\\_loss\\_of\\_britains\\_biodiversity.html](http://www.theecologist.org/News/news_analysis/2988125/state_of_nature_2016_report_shows_continued_loss_of_britains_biodiversity.html) Last Viewed: 16/11/2016

<sup>9</sup> Available, URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/sep/14/one-in-10-uk-wildlife-species-faces-extinction-major-report-shows> Last Viewed: 16/11/2016



### **Definition of other key terms, as applied in this thesis**

**Relationship:** ‘the way in which two or more people or things are connected or related to one another; the way in which two or more people or groups think of and behave towards each other’ (OEED, 2011, p.489). I also apply this to the way people relate to (think of or behave towards) nature.<sup>10</sup>

**Youth (young people):** ‘the period between childhood and adult age; being young (having lived or existed for only a short time; not old)’ (OEED, Ibid., p.686). This stage of life is also referred to as adolescence, and as explained by Valentine (2003, p.38), this is ‘not a phase to be grown out of, it is a part of a lifelong process that shapes and defines a person’.

**Creative:** this is the adjective of the verb to create – ‘to bring something into existence; to produce something as a result of what you do; to give a new rank or position to someone’ (or something) (OEED, 2011, p.141). This is a term I use repeatedly throughout my thesis. There is a long and complex history to the study of creativity, much of which falls outside of the scope of this study. I attempt to explore this complexity as succinctly as possible. In 1994, Feldman et al. proposed a framework for the study of creativity that emphasised its transformatory potential to significantly change a way of working, through achieving something that is novel and remarkable. Within their discussion, they highlight the multiple definitions and applications of the concept of creativity, which result in its apparently elusive definition. Park et al. (2004, p.606) define creativity as ‘Thinking of novel and

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<sup>10</sup> See pp.23-5 for conversation with young person/people about this with regard to dis/connection to nature, and pp.84-85 for summary of conversation about this with practitioners.

productive ways to do things; includes artistic achievement but is not limited to it'. They link this to originality and ingenuity.

In contrast, Runco and Jaeger (2012) assert there is a need to remind researchers that there *is* a standard definition that can be applied in academic studies: 'Creativity requires both originality and effectiveness' (Ibid., p.92). This definition is based on a long history of rigorous creativity studies, with has roots that they trace back to the 1930s. This bipartite definition emphasises that originality on its own is not sufficient: this can result in things that are novel, or ingenious, that are of no/little use. The notion of effectiveness takes multiple forms, including usefulness, appropriateness and fit. Runco and Jaeger's definition is more appropriate for my study, as although I embrace and relish opportunities to try new things, to write creatively and to make creative objects, this is with the specific purpose of enabling me to be more effective in addressing my research topic.

**Exploration:** this is the noun of the verb to explore – 'to travel into or through a country or region in order to learn about it; to examine or investigate a subject or idea carefully' (OED, 2011, p.209). As a qualitative research term, it signifies the research aim is to seek new insights, ask questions and provide a better understanding of the topic, rather than to provide conclusive evidence. It also indicates that the researcher who chooses to apply this term is flexible (Robson, 2002) and willing to change their direction in response to the revelation of new data and new insights. This is poetically elucidated by Sarah J. Tracy in a way that

provides an effective summary of the way I have conducted my research (2013, p.81):

Explorers travel in one direction, then in another; they linger and watch the sunset, take note of impressive landmarks, note the places worth a return visit. Explorers do not know what they will find. They circle around and back. Their paths are not linear. They do not know exactly what they are looking for, but they maintain curiosity.

Park et al. (2004, p.606) identify curiosity as a character strength, and define it as 'interest, novelty-seeking, openness to experience: Taking an interest in all of ongoing experience; finding all subjects and topics fascinating; exploring and discovering'. For me this is fundamental to my creativity.

**Making sense:** This is more complex to define: it includes exploration as a way of experiencing things, but also encompasses the meaning-making that may then result. The OED (op. cit., p.532) provides a starting point, defining sense as: 'the ability to see, hear, touch, taste or smell things; ability to perceive or feel or be conscious of a thing; the power to make good decisions; a sound practical judgement; the meaning, or one of the meanings, of a word, phrase or passage'. When I started this study, I titled my research 'Making SenSE of Nature', and proposed to investigate the Sensory, Spiritual and Emotional connections young people have with nature, extending research conducted by Warber and Irvine (2008). However, this changed very quickly, once I started spending time and talking with young people. I became uncomfortable with the concept of dis/connection, and moved to viewing it as a relationship (discussed later, p.25). I also wanted to take more of an exploratory approach, to see what themes would emerge from my

research, rather than looking for predetermined concepts such as sensory, spiritual and emotional connections.

Klein, Moon and Hoffman (2006, pp.70-71) go further than the OEED definition within an essay titled: 'Making Sense of Sensemaking 1: Alternative Perspectives', <sup>11</sup> in which they identify five interlinked concepts within the concept of sense-making: creativity; curiosity; comprehension; mental modelling and situation awareness. By linking these five concepts, they provide a definition of sense-making as: '... a motivated, continuous effort to understand connections (which can be among people, places, and events) each to anticipate their trajectories and act effectively' (Ibid., p.71). This is a more appropriate definition to apply to my research as it highlights the importance of connections, and the complexity involved in this.

**Story, Storytelling, Storied:** these terms/concepts, along with the terms fable, tale, anecdote, and magic moment are explored in more detail in later (pp.50-2), in the context of my primary research. Here I provide a concise 'working' definition, in preparation for a more extended discussion later. The OEED (op. cit., p.584) definition of story is: 'an account of an incident or of a series of incidents, either true or invented.' I refer to some of my stories as fables: a '... short story, usually with animals as characters, intended to convey a moral' (OEED, op. cit., p.212).

The critical exploration of the key concepts within my thesis provides a conceptual framework for reporting my fieldwork experiences, that can be seen to pay heed to what Van Maanen describes as '... the underrated criteria of apparency and

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<sup>11</sup> Klein, Moon and Hoffman (2006) URL:  
<http://perigeantechnologies.com/publications/MakingSenseofSensemaking1-AlternativePerspectives.pdf> Last Viewed: 29/08/2016

verisimilitude' (Van Maanen, 1988/2011, p.xv). Apparency is the quality of being apparent: as an adjective apparent means clearly seen or understood; as an adverb, it means seeming to be true or real. The word verisimilitude implies the appearance of being true or lifelike, and is applied to creatively written texts to show that they are realistic and authentic, providing a 'life-like portrayal' (Leavy, 2016a, p.21). I choose these terms to apply to my research, in preference to the more usual, and arguably over-rated terms 'reliability and validity'<sup>12</sup> as they are more appropriate for qualitative research. Reliability is used to infer stability, replicability, generalizability and consistency, and fails to take account of context or subjectivity in favour of objectivity. Like Sarah J. Tracy (2013),<sup>13</sup> I embrace qualitative methods in recognition that '...socially constructed understandings are always in process and necessarily partial' and thus, notions like reliability and validity are 'downright problematic' (Ibid., p.229) for studies like mine. Tracy identifies 'Eight "big-tent" criteria for excellent qualitative research' (Ibid., p.231),<sup>14</sup> listing these as: worthy topic; rich rigour; sincerity; credibility; resonance; significant contribution; ethical; meaningful coherence. I found this eight-point conceptual model a useful tool, both for guiding the process of research, and as a means of assessing my contribution to knowledge. This is due to the criteria she suggests being universal, yet flexible, and more applicable to studies embracing alternative research methodologies.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> I acknowledge that within other research paradigms, validity and reliability may be meaningful and important concepts.

<sup>13</sup> I give her full name to avoid potential confusion as her last name is the same as my first name.

<sup>14</sup> The term 'big tent' was first used by Denzin, who argued we need a "bigger tent" to include all types of qualitative research (2008: 321).

<sup>15</sup> For a longer exposition that responds to Sarah J. Tracy's suggestions, please see Gordon, J. and Patterson, J.A (2013) 'Response to Tracy's Under the "Big Tent": Establishing Universal Criteria for Evaluating Qualitative Research'. *Qualitative Inquiry*. 19(9) pp.689–695. I return to this discussion on p.272.

Returning to the terms apparenity and verisimilitude: when I share my experiences, I do so with the aim that my words will resonate with the reader, who will perceive my work as credible, sincere and meaningful. They will recognise and hopefully empathise with the people in the stories (tales, fables) and become engaged with the subject matter. I appreciate you do not have to empathise to engage, and that dislike can provoke engagement; however, I feel I would be doing a disservice to the participants in this research if my stories resulted in them being disliked by the people who read about them. This is an example of my commitment to the ethical values of Youth Work. In general, I use the term 'Youth Work' as two words rather than the one-word version youthwork,<sup>16</sup> as this is how it is applied by The Institute for Youth Work,<sup>17</sup> and the campaign group 'In Defence of Youth Work'.<sup>18</sup> This usage aims to show there is equal focus on people of a specific age (youth) and practice (work), and the relationship between the two dimensions.<sup>19</sup>

In the next section, I provide an outline of my research aims and questions, together with a discussion of the initial sources examined.

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<sup>16</sup> In places, I have used the one-word form, for example where this has been utilised by a conference session, or within a response to a call for papers that uses this form.

<sup>17</sup> The Institute for Youth Work (IYW) is a membership organisation for Youth Workers and those that espouse youth work methodologies and ethics in their work with young people. URL: <http://iyw.org.uk/> Last Viewed 21/11/2016.

<sup>18</sup> In Defence of Youth Work (2016) Campaigns for Youth Work that is 'that is volatile and voluntary, creative and collective – an association and conversation without guarantees'. URL: <https://indefenceofyouthwork.com/> Last Viewed 21/11/2016.

<sup>19</sup> For a more depth analysis of this, please see URL: <http://infed.org/mobi/what-is-youth-work-exploring-the-history-theory-and-practice-of-work-with-young-people/> Last Viewed 16/11/2016.

## **Research Aims and Research Questions**

My overall aim is to develop a greater understanding of young people's relationship with nature. This has the purpose of improving learning to advance workplace practices (of practitioners who work outdoors with young people), and to generate new knowledge and theory (as generally expected of a doctoral study). It has three strands, each with their own specific research question:

- How do young people make sense of nature? Through addressing this question, I aim to understand young people's relationships with nature, and how this may impact on their perception of their health and well-being, and on their desire (or otherwise) to help conserve the natural environment. Asking this question has the specific purpose of enabling me to adopt a young-person centred approach to both conducting my research, and to the outputs developed from it.
- How do practitioners (professionals who work outdoors with young people) make sense of nature? By exploring practitioners' relationships with nature, I aim to understand how this may impact on the way they work with young people. Addressing this question has the specific purpose of providing guidance for practitioners, to enable them to more effectively engage with young people within the natural environment (see Toolkit in Part Two).
- How do I make sense of nature? By reflecting on my experiences, I aim to gain an awareness and understanding of my relationship with nature. Asking this question has the specific purpose of enabling me to understand how this may impact on the way I work (in practice) and on the way, I conduct and present research.

Addressing and answering these three strands has the specific purpose of enabling me to develop a holistic understanding of young people's relationship with nature, by viewing it through these different lenses (discussed, p.43). This learning is

already being used to inform the development of modules within the University of Cumbria's BA in Working with Children, Young People and Families.<sup>20</sup>

### **Initial sources examined**

To narrow down the scope of my study, I chose to focus my research on non-formal education programmes that come under the umbrella term of **Outdoor Learning**. Outdoor learning is a term encompassing a wide range of activities including: play; school grounds projects; environmental and conservation education; recreational and adventure activities, as well as personal and social development programmes (IOL, 2014). Although some of the programmes I looked at may have been delivered within a school setting, and may have complemented the English national curriculum (DfE, 2013), they were not primarily designed to deliver the formal curriculum and were developed/monitored by external conservation/environmental or youth development organisations, rather than by the Government.

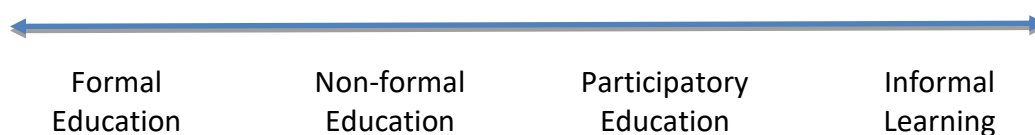
I adopted this focus for two reasons. First, it enabled my research to be more comprehensive by addressing a range of issues which are not typically addressed by formal, school-based curricula. In contrast to formal education, non-formal education may be defined as '...any organized educational activity outside the established formal system - whether operating separately or as an important feature of some broader activity - that is intended to serve identifiable learning clientèle and learning objectives' (Coombs et al., 1973 discussed by Fordham, 1993,

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<sup>20</sup> For more information, see: <https://www.cumbria.ac.uk/study/courses/undergraduate/working-with-children-and-families/> Last Viewed 4/02/2017



and cited in Smith 2001: non-paginated).<sup>21</sup> The boundaries between formal/non-formal/informal education are indistinct, often blurred and also highly contested. As further argued by Smith (2002: non-paginated) this distinction ‘derives from an administrative or institutional concern’ and focuses on the management and funding of initiatives, rather than the learning that is involved. This point is further elucidated by Rogers (2004) who suggests we move beyond Coombs’ typology by viewing education as a continuum, thus recognising the ‘fuzzy boundaries’ (Ibid.) between the different forms.



**Figure 1: Educational continuum, adapted from Rogers (2004)<sup>22</sup>**

With reference to this continuum, the projects within my research study occupy the middle ground, as they went beyond informal learning, and were targeted interventions, with a clear purpose. They were more typical of what has more recently been termed *informal education*, defined as:

...being driven by conversation and, hence, unpredictable. Informal educators do not know where conversation might lead. They have to catch the moment, to try to say or do something to deepen people’s thinking or to put others in touch with their feelings. Such ‘going with the flow’ opens up all sorts of possibilities (Smith, 2002: non-paginated).

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<sup>21</sup> Smith, M. K. (2001). ‘What is non-formal education?’, the encyclopaedia of informal education. URL: <http://infed.org/mobi/what-is-non-formal-education/>. Last Viewed: 23/10/2016.

<sup>22</sup> Rogers, A. (2004) ‘Looking again at non-formal and informal education – towards a new paradigm’, the encyclopaedia of informal education, Available, URL: [www.infed.org/biblio/non\\_formal\\_paradigm.htm](http://www.infed.org/biblio/non_formal_paradigm.htm). Last Viewed: 16/11/2016

Adopting this definition, informal education is a practice that can take place in any setting, and as a process, is a useful way of exploring and ‘enlarging experience’ (Ibid.). Recognising and valuing this approach has formed an integral part of my research methodology.

A second reason for this focus was the awareness that there are many large-scale, well-resourced research projects already investigating school-based programmes, for example, the RSPB – University of Essex’s ‘Measuring connection to nature in children’ research project (Bragg, Wood, Barton and Pretty, 2013) and the Natural Connections Demonstration Project (Growing Schools, 2014). I had no wish to replicate / imitate this work, and as my expertise and experience have been developed within Outdoor Learning it made sense to embrace this perspective to the topic, and to make use of my established relationships within this sector.

Within Outdoor Learning, I looked at two distinct types of facilitated programmes that either (1) supported (indirectly or directly) young people to feel better about themselves (for example, Youth Work, Youth Development Work) or (2) were aimed at developing a connection with nature and encouraging caring for the planet (for example, environmental education, conservation education). Taking these in turn:

**Youth Work** has core values, including: <sup>23</sup>

- Young people choosing to take part.
- Utilising young people’s view of the world.

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<sup>23</sup> For more detail on this, please see <http://www.nya.org.uk/careers-youth-work/what-is-youth-work/>

- Treating young people with respect.
- Seeking to develop young people's skills and attitudes rather than remedy 'problem behaviours'.
- Helping young people develop stronger relationships and collective identities.
- Respecting and valuing differences.
- Promoting the voice of young people.

**Conservation Education** (CE) is a fundamental part of environmental education (ODE, n.d.) and comprises raising environmental awareness, increasing understanding and addressing sustainability and equity issues. In practice the terms conservation and environment are applied interchangeably, to denote educational programmes with a focus on the natural world. A key component of these programmes worldwide, is the emphasis on 'practical, hands-on, community based learning' (Kobori, 2009).

Tilbury (1996) conducted a review into the assumptions and concepts within policy documents that are used to inform resources for environmental education. She argued that environmental/conservation education is essentially an education involving the **head, heart and hand** (my emphasis in bold), whereby '...students engage in education ABOUT, IN and FOR the environment' (Ibid., p.1). Whilst this study was more than two decades ago, this three-pronged approach is also encapsulated within the '3H' model, first developed by Patrick Geddes that, as identified by Manole (2010), has been used extensively within learning and teacher-

training initiatives, for example the John Muir Award. Implicit within this process is the role of the facilitator<sup>24</sup> of the learning experiences.

In recent years there has been an increasing focus on developing and nurturing a connection with nature, and there has been an embracing of youth work approaches within conservation/environmental organisations. As a result, in practice, there is a significant overlap between these two categories: youth work/youth development programmes that take place outdoors will often include environmental and/or conservation activities; and conservation education is often informed by youth work practice.

### **My position within this research project – *why me, why this topic?***

This topic emerged initially through my experiences as a practitioner, parent and person who values nature. My research initially proposed to explore young people's connections with nature, focusing on sensory, spiritual and emotional connections. However, within a few months of starting research I became uncomfortable with the terms 'connection' and 'disconnection'. These are adult terms, used to phrase adults' concerns about young people; I find them alarmist, negative and ineffectual in conversations with (and about) young people. This negativity was not reflected in the findings that emerged from my fieldwork, nor a comfortable fit with my values as a youth and community development worker. I value a more positive (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), appreciative (Cooperrider et al., 1995) and person-centred (Rogers, 1975) approach. The young people who participated in my study

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<sup>24</sup> I have used the term facilitator here to include all those within a teaching/learning role, for example: teachers, youth workers and environmental educators (see p.20 for Educational Continuum).

did not appear to understand or value the concept of 'dis/connection to nature'. For example, I spoke with a young person near the start of my fieldwork. We had spent time together on a residential in an outdoor education centre, and at the end of the weekend, he asked me to interview him for my research. Here is an extract from the interview, presented in anecdotal form:

***Anecdote 2: Shift from Dis/connection to Nature, to Relationship with Nature (conversation with Jack)*** <sup>25</sup>

Me: So, you know we were talking about how some people think that young people are disconnected from nature, what does that mean to you - disconnected from nature?

Jack: I haven't a clue what it is...ermm...scared of sheep?

Me: Scared of sheep, yeah?

Jack: to a point, yeah.

Me: So, if we looked at it another way then, what would 'connected to nature' look like?

Jack: That's difficult to say, cos there's...I wouldn't say there's...many that are properly connected to nature. It's like when we were doing the valley walk, umm...we were talking, but there were times when we thought, they've done this before, or they're enjoying this, without even saying anything, cos I can read body language pretty well.

This conversation made me stop and question what I was doing, and how I was doing it (see later, Figure 2, p.36). I shared this experience with a colleague, who questioned if I was talking with the right young people, and suggested I may want to talk with more informed young people, for example A-level or university students. My instinctive reaction was they were the right young people, as they are the ones

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<sup>25</sup> Pseudonym.

the programmes 'target': it was my approach that was not right. I therefore realigned my research focus and changed the wording from dis/connections to relationship.<sup>26</sup> This broader, less polarized concept encompasses the duality of connection/disconnection, as well as the concepts of estrangement (Pretty, 2007) and belonging. I found people (of all ages) responded to discussions and questions using it, in a more intuitive and comfortable way, and I needed to provide less explanation as to what it was I was exploring. Subsequently, this realignment has also enabled me to distinguish my research from other current/recent projects that are researching connections to nature, predominantly using quantitative measures, for example: Connection to Nature Index – CNI (Cheng and Monroe, 2010); Inclusion of Nature in Self - INS (Schultz, 2002); Nature Relatedness Scale – NR-6 (Nisbet et al., 2009).

Since the age of the Victorians (Szerszynski 2005), there has been an increased focus on the well-being aspects of the natural environment. Writers such as John Ruskin, Beatrix Potter, Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson and John Muir have helped to raise awareness of the importance of the natural world, and of the need to conserve it for the benefit of future generations. In more recent times, their theories have been expounded and further developed by writers such as Richard Mabey, Richard Louv, Jules Pretty and Colin Mortlock, and by organisations such as the John Muir Trust, the Scouts and Woodcraft Folk. Most people would recognise that humans are having a negative impact on nature. However, increasing population, global climate change, and technological/economic developments are

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<sup>26</sup> See also p.12 and pp.84-85.

making ever-increasing demands on the land. Recognition of this need to conserve the natural environment (Peterson et al. 2007) would appear to have occurred concurrently with a realisation that, globally, mental disorders are increasing (Randerson, 2007), particularly amongst children and young people. There is a growing awareness that people's increasingly urbanised, non-natural lifestyles may be contributing to this.

As identified within the Essex University-RSPB report (Bragg et al., 2013, pp.5-6), to date '...there has been no robust scientific attempt to measure and track connection to nature amongst UK children'. Whilst I welcome any initiative that aims to highlight the importance of spending time outdoors, like many other researchers (see, for example: Goleman, 2008; Chia, 2006; Warber and Irvine, 2008) I believe such research projects are attempting to *measure the immeasurable* (my emphasis in italics). Throughout my work (as a practitioner and as an academic) I have challenged this apparent need to measure, quantify and to statistically signify concepts arguably better suited to interpretative practices. The characteristics of a relationship are subjective, elusive concepts which change with each situation, individual and environment. My interest lies within the perception and interpretation of this by the people within the relationship. This is not something I believe to be measurable.

I identified the gap in knowledge which my research is exploring through my familiarity with practice, as an Environmental Youth Worker, and teacher of youth/community workers. My experiences suggested there was a lack of

satisfactory explanations for how to understand and nurture children/young people's relationships with nature. Added to this was my increasing concern at the lack of/inadequacy of training provided for workers in this area. This awareness developed through my roles first as a co-ordinator of environmental education (with responsibility for training), then deepened as a training manager for a Youth Work charity. My developing research in the area has included:

- BSc. in Natural Sciences, for which I conducted research into how natural scientists can communicate environmental messages (specifically the incidence of parvovirus in seals).
- University Certificate (Postgraduate Level) in Education for Sustainability, which involved research into the equality of opportunity for involvement of young people in environmental education activities organised by a local Wildlife Trust. For this I conducted a survey (questionnaires) amongst colleagues, and reviewed a recent survey conducted by environmental staff at the local County Council.
- MA dissertation – 'An exploration into the value of using a youth-work approach to environmental youth volunteering projects'.

The purpose of my MA research project was to develop an understanding of the experiences of practitioners involved in developing and delivering environmental youth volunteering projects. This involved questionnaires and interviews with individuals from a range of environmental organisations, and through studying relevant literature. Themes and issues were selected for in-depth focus, based on my knowledge and experience as a professional worker in this field. The project was developed in recognition that in recent years there had been a transformation in the scope and range of projects available to volunteers, to include more of a focus on community action and cohesion, sustainable development, climate change,



regeneration, health and well-being. This was accompanied by a concerted effort to engage with, and encourage, a diverse cohort of young volunteers that was more representative of the population. Organisations were presented with many challenges within this area of work, including securing funding, shortage of suitably trained/experienced staff and a lack of awareness of the complexities of working with young people. My research found it was the values and principles, espoused and demonstrated by the staff members who develop and deliver projects, which ensured the success of projects. I found the ideal was for a combination of environmental awareness and an understanding of the youth work approach: where this could not be found in one person, there needed to be collaboration, support and partnership working.

One of the most notable findings was the concern that exists amongst environmentalists about the increasing disconnectivity children and young people have from the natural environment. This provided the inspiration for developing my doctoral study. However, I was also conscious my earlier research project had focussed on the experiences of project staff, including myself, not those of young people, and was therefore biased to a worker's (and adult) perspective. I was keen to counteract this within my doctoral study by adopting more of a young person-centred approach.

The research for the MA in Youth Work and Community Development, plus subsequent action research for a Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (DTLLS), and work-based research for funding bids helped to confirm the

need for an alternative, relationship-based approach. Much of the research to date has adopted a different focus – on raising alarm about the issue of dis/connection to nature and suggesting solutions. This is usually linked to justifying the need for funding to provide a solution(s). I know this, because I was one of the people responsible for doing this (applying for funding) and for supporting/encouraging others to do the same (mentoring them to apply for funding).

Conservation/Environmental Education is big business. Taking the UK as an example, Clifford et al.'s study (2013, p.3)<sup>27</sup> highlights 'Third sector organisations (TSOs) with an environmental mission are some of the most well-known and supported in the country'. Their research attempted to give a '...comprehensive analysis of data on the size, shape and scope' of these organisations, and despite what they acknowledge as a paucity of evidence, they found that:

- 4,887 charities have environment as one of their three main activities, with another 2,775 other forms of voluntary organisation, making a total of 7,662 organisations forming the broad environmental third sector.
- The estimated total income for primarily-environmental charities in 2008 was around £1.3bn.

I conducted a small-scale review of main environmental organisations by looking at their most recently published annual accounts (eight organisations, mix of 2014/15 and 2015/16 accounts) and found their stated annual income was approximately £996,627,957 which suggests Clifford et al.'s estimate of £1.3bn was reasonably

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<sup>27</sup> Clifford et al. (2013) Last Viewed 29/08/2016. URL: <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/generic/tsrc/documents/tsrc/working-papers/working-paper-98.pdf>

accurate; furthermore, the eight I focused on comprise a significant part of this (nearly £1bn). Many of these organisations also specifically mention connections to nature within these documents, for example:

- The John Muir Trust: ‘The Trust encourages thousands to **connect** with, enjoy and care for our wild places’ (p.8).<sup>28</sup>
- RSPB: ‘Our new family proposition will give parents the opportunity and information they need to better **connect** their children to **nature**’ (p.9, my emphasis added in bold).<sup>29</sup>

The concept of connection to nature has been identified by many as the ‘Next Big Human Trend’.<sup>30</sup> A quick, informal internet-based search near the start of my research using the search term “natural connections, connected to nature” revealed about 3,610,000 results,<sup>31</sup> a similar search repeated near the end of my study produced 22,800,000 results.<sup>32</sup> The results included all the major conservation/environmental and outdoor learning providers in the UK, together with statutory/governmental organisations and a wealth of smaller, private and charitable organisations and individuals. Their concern is mirrored across much of the westernised world, particularly the USA (see, for example: Louv, 2005; 2009; 2013), and represents a significant investment in time, money and other resources.

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<sup>28</sup> The John Muir Trust. Last Viewed 13/08/2016 URL: [https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/assets/000/001/616/JMT\\_ANN\\_REP\\_2015\\_SMALL\\_original.pdf?1460373494](https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/assets/000/001/616/JMT_ANN_REP_2015_SMALL_original.pdf?1460373494)

<sup>29</sup> RSPB. Last Viewed 13/08/2016 URL: [https://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/trusteesreportsandaccounts2015\\_tcm9-382815.pdf](https://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/trusteesreportsandaccounts2015_tcm9-382815.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> This is a concern that extends beyond academia to more general conversation, as an example, please see [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/daniel-crockett/nature-connection-will-be-the-next-big-human-trend\\_b\\_5698267.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/daniel-crockett/nature-connection-will-be-the-next-big-human-trend_b_5698267.html) Last Viewed 30/12/2014.

<sup>31</sup> This search was conducted using Google, Last Viewed 30/12/2014

<sup>32</sup> This search was conducted using Bing, Last Viewed 07/06/2016. It was repeated two days later using Google, producing a similar result.

I believe it is timely to problematise the concept of dis/connected children and young people (Bragg et al., op. cit.), to take a step back and to reflect on the wider cultural and social context for this debate. This includes critically questioning how we frame this debate, the way we conduct research and how we present our findings – our methods of communication.

As identified in the previous section and in the following chapters, throughout my research I have made use of creative approaches, both to elicit data, to analyse it and to communicate my findings. I purposively aim to write in an engaging and lively manner. By embracing more ‘stylish’ approaches as advocated by Sword (2012), I aim to make my work accessible by avoiding overly academic language, maintaining my focus on practical applications and everyday language. In the initial phase of my study I was resistant to using academic language, and was encouraged by the head of the graduate school to address this by writing a companion text of stories (captured as an anecdote, presented in Part Three, pp.273-4).<sup>33</sup> This formed part of the process that enabled me to define my methodology (see later, Figure 2, p.36). Another way of doing this is by using writing as a method of inquiry,<sup>34</sup> so it becomes a ‘dynamic, creative process’ as identified by Richardson (2000 in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p.924):

Writing as a method of inquiry...provides a research practice through which we can investigate how we construct the world, ourselves, and others, and how standard objectifying practices of social science unnecessarily limit us and social science.

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<sup>33</sup> I felt liberated by this conversation, as if I had been given permission to be *myself* in my writing, to be imaginative and creative.

<sup>34</sup> I explore this further within my methodology, see p.59, p.81 and p.270.

My thesis is presented as an ongoing exploratory conversation. By consciously avoiding use of an impersonal or passive voice I aim to encourage readers to enter this dialogue. One of the critical aspects of this approach has been my use of the first-person perspective and my personal voice within much of my written work. I do this mindfully, not to be controversial, or to challenge academic conventions, but to be overt in expressing my personal opinions and emotions on this subject: to strengthen my argument and clarify my perspective. Consciously using 'I' and 'my' in my work is a method for 'rendering it more immediate, embodied, and compelling' (Duke University, n.d., p.3). The authorial 'I' represents more than the first-person pronoun: it is an ethical choice with inherent social, moral and political consequences for which I need to assume responsibility (Kirsch, 1994). As Lounasmaa (2016, non-paginated) reminds us, 'stories are an important part of identity' and we must take care not to exploit our position as collectors of the stories of others.

I include a multiplicity of other voices within my text, within interview excerpts and quotations. In doing this, I recognise the importance of providing the cultural context and theoretical framework required to elicit understanding (Kirsch, 1997). I acknowledge I retain authorial control over the editing process and interpretive responsibility, therefore I am making my presence visible in an honest and direct manner. To differentiate between voices, I adopt the question posed by many feminists: 'When is it appropriate – and ethically responsible – to *exclude* the authorial I?' (Kirsch, 1997, p.383). Therefore, the default position for my writing is

the authorial 'I' and where I deviate from this I will take care to explain my decision and to explore the potential consequences.

The other key element of my approach to writing is my use of stories to illustrate key points and to explore issues in more detail. These are more than an illustration, they offer additional meaning by highlighting the significant moments, and key points within my research. The stories included within my thesis are a mix of both creative fiction and creative nonfiction. However, they are representative of the lives of many children and young people in the UK (and of some in other countries in the westernised world). The protagonists in them may be recognisable to readers as representational of children they know. To check the appropriateness of this claim, I have shared all the stories included here with a variety of audiences, who have helped me to refine and define each character so it is both credible and anonymous. This is important to enable my research to be recognised as contributing to knowledge, to do justice to the participants in my project whilst respecting their right to privacy and anonymity, and to respect those who supervise me.

### **Expected implications of the research**

In Part Three of this thesis, I will state my contribution to knowledge; here I state the expected implications and outcomes of my research. This will enable me to identify how I have gone beyond what I originally intended, by responding to unforeseen opportunities. The primary expected outcome was to inform educational policy regarding outdoor, conservation and environmental education. Through dissemination of my findings at local, national and international events,

and through written publications, I offer suggestions for new and different approaches, founded in young peoples' perspectives.

The central research focus intersects education, informal education/youth work, conservation/environmental education and outdoor learning. It also traverses the worlds of child development, pre-school and primary education, family learning/development and lifelong learning. Therefore, I expect this research to have relevance to many people/organisations and to relate to broader social issues (such as the crisis of childhood) and the response by policy makers to reports from, for example, the Children's Society,<sup>35</sup> UNICEF<sup>36</sup> and books such as Sue Palmer's 'Toxic Childhood' (2006) and Richard Louv's 'Last Child in the Woods' (2005).

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<sup>35</sup> The Children's Society, See URL: <http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/> Last Viewed 7/01/2017

<sup>36</sup> UNICEF, See URL: <https://www.unicef.org/> Last Viewed 7/01/2017

## **Chapter 2: Methodology**

This second chapter explains the methodology for conducting my primary research (fieldwork), and how this was defined by my experiences and reflections at the beginning of my fieldwork. I explain how this has informed my methods for interpreting and communicating my research findings. This is explored further in Chapter 4, presented as a paper focusing on how my research approach was shaped by my encounter with a young person. Figure 2 (below) provides an overview of the major methodological decisions I have taken with a dated summary of the events informing the choices made. The reasons and justification for these will be explained within subsequent chapters. This chapter includes an exploration of my ethical, conceptual and theoretical framework (summarised in Table 1, p.38). This is followed by explanation of my methods and an overview of the participants in my study.

### **Ethics**

I obtained ethical clearance from the University of Cumbria's Ethics Committee in two stages: the first stage was to conduct an evaluation of using the Listening Guide<sup>37</sup> to analyse interviews and stories provided by participants. The second stage of ethical clearance was for the subsequent stages of research and included the use of participant observation as a method of data collection. No negative ethical events were encountered during the research; however ethical and moral considerations were inherent throughout, discussion of which has been incorporated into the body of this thesis.

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<sup>37</sup> This analytical guide is explained later, p.40 and pp.46-49, and is applied pp.78-80.



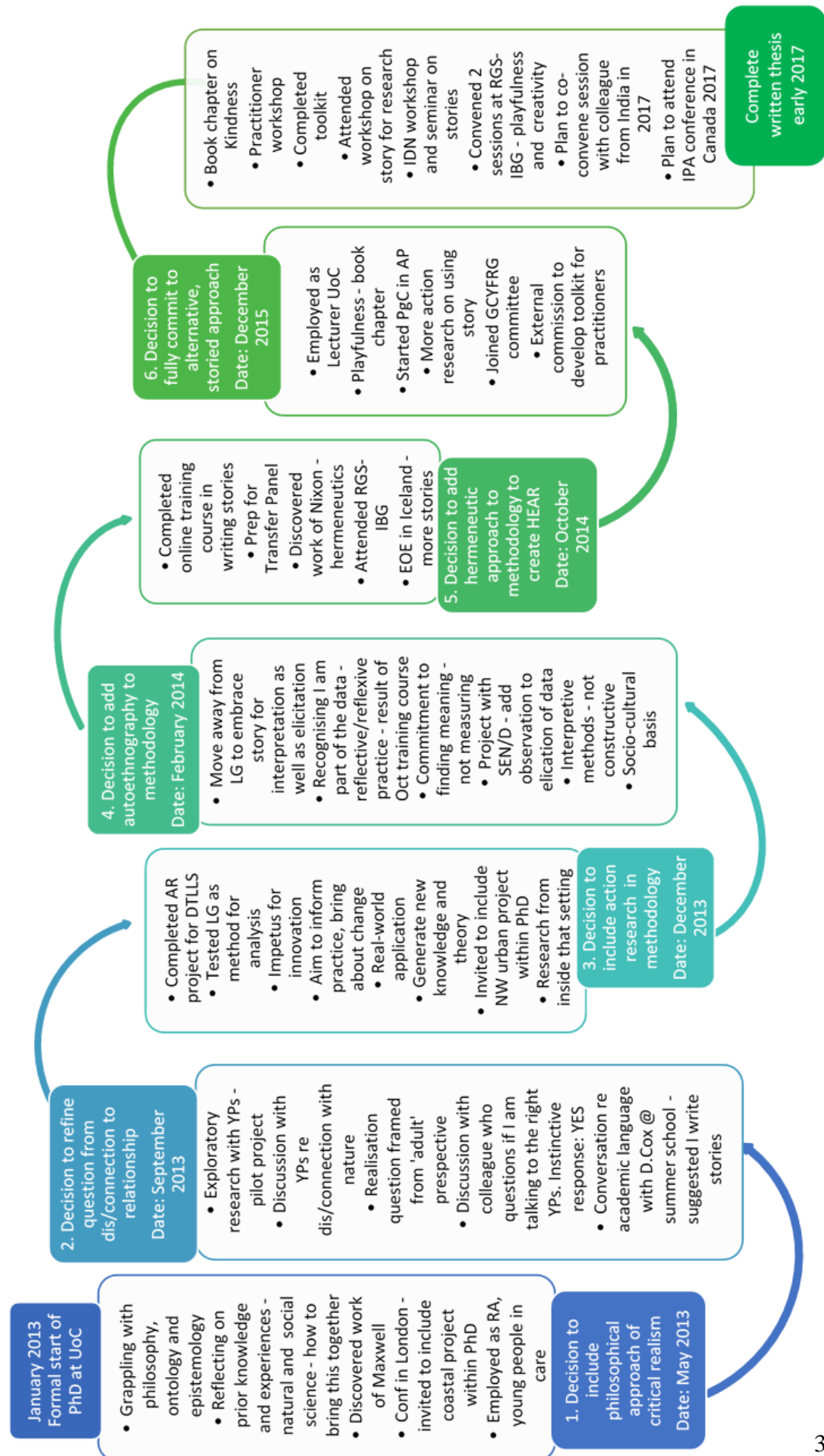


Figure 2: Decision Tree: summary of major methodological decisions, events informing the choices made, with the date.

## **Theoretical, philosophical and conceptual framework**

I have a critical realism philosophy (Decision 1 in Figure 2, Decision Tree, p.36), which recognises the existence of a real world that functions independently of whether we understand it. It is our knowledge and understanding of this that is partial, subjective and interpreted/constructed. It also views an individual's meaning and ideas - their concepts, beliefs, feelings, intentions - as equally real as physical processes and objects (Maxwell, 2012). These two facets of reality mutually influence each other and interact in social life. This perspective is underpinned by hermeneutics, the philosophical approach I take to interpreting, understanding and attempting to make sense of the world.

The schema below (Table 1) summarises my framework, identifying the concepts, theories and 'theoretical friends' enabling me to explore my research aims: 'The use of concepts gives us a means of making sense of the world' (Ridley, 2008, p.21). My use of the term 'theoretical friends' is another example of my conversational approach: these are the authors/researchers whose theories and methods I have found most effective in helping me to address my research questions, and their work has informed my thinking. Within this framework, I show how the various thoughts and theories were more formally drawn together to create a coherent thesis.

**Table 1: Schema outlining the conceptual framework for my study**

Definitions	My choices
<b>Theoretical Perspective.</b> This refers to the underlying philosophical assumption about researcher's view of the human world and the social life within.	A hermeneutic enquiry (Nixon, 2014) that draws on autoethnography and action research, based on the use of conversation and interpretative, creative methods.
<b>Ontology.</b> This refers to what exists – the nature of reality.	Critical Realism (Maxwell, 2012) - the belief that there is a real world that exists independently of our beliefs and construction.
<b>Epistemology.</b> This refers to how we gain knowledge of what exists – how we can know anything – the nature of knowledge.	Interpretivism- the belief that it is our knowledge of this world that is interpreted. Understanding of behaviour includes the meaning that social actors give to what they and others do. When people interact, they interpret what is going on and this is what gives social life its patterned quality.
<b>Axiology.</b> This refers to the internal valuing systems that influence our perceptions, decisions and actions. Includes ethical and moral stance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institute for Youth Work Code of Ethics.</li> <li>• University of Cumbria Ethical Committee.</li> <li>• Participant organisations' ethical and moral codes.</li> <li>• My personal moral and ethical code.</li> </ul>
<b>Methodology.</b> This refers to the systematic, theoretical analysis of the methods applied.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hermeneutic enquiry.</li> <li>• Ethnographic action research (EAR) combining Action Research (McNiff, 2013) and Autoethnography (Reed-Danahay, 1997).</li> <li>• Writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson, 2000).</li> <li>• Relational and reflexive approaches (Etherington, 2004; Moon, 2004).</li> </ul>
<b>Methods of data collection / elicitation.</b> This refers to how information is going to be obtained.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Semi-structured Interviews – face to face and by email.</li> <li>• Elicitation of data through observation/ participant observation; naturalistic interviews; conversations; field notes/ reflective journal.</li> <li>• Collection/gathering of data through documentation.</li> </ul>
<b>Methods of data analysis.</b> This refers to the process of inspecting, cleaning and transforming data to discover useful findings and suggesting conclusions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hermeneutic enquiry – listening to data, and returning to it several times (Nixon, 2014).</li> <li>• Transcription of interviews to create written text from oral stories, with interpretive and thematic analysis to identify themes/issues to form stories.</li> </ul>
<b>Presentation of findings.</b> This refers to the ways in findings of my research are shared.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I-poems (Gilligan, 1993).</li> <li>• Ethno-fictional/ metaphorical stories and fables (Carson, 1956; 1962, reprint 2000).</li> </ul>

My second major decision (Decision 2 in Figure 2, Decision Tree, p.36) was to refine my research away from dis/connection to nature, to relationship.<sup>38</sup> I continued exploring potential methods for gathering/eliciting data and for analysing/interpreting what I discovered. I then made the decision (Decision 3 in Decision Tree) to be guided by the principles of Action Research. Having used this within a Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (DTLLS) I had found it an effective way of addressing qualitative questions whilst maintaining a focus on practical applications. Completing DTLLS during the early phases of my PhD study allowed me to test my methods in an additional setting, gain valuable feedback from another source and refine the methods I ultimately chose to use.<sup>39</sup>

There are two key aims for my research: to improve learning to advance workplace practices, and to generate new knowledge and theory (see p.18). This impetus for innovation is a typical feature of action research (see for example, McNiff and Whitehead, 2011; Somekh and Lewin, 2011; Gomm, 2009; Denscombe, 2007, 2002) and is central to the research, rather than a recommendation or 'tag on' as may happen with other forms of research. Another distinctive characteristic of action research is the researcher is typically a practitioner within a workplace setting, involved at every stage of the process: '...it is research from inside that setting' (Somekh and Lewin, op. cit., p.94). This contrasts with other research strategies which insist on the researcher being objective and external to the practice/setting. This has meant, wherever possible, I have undertaken the role of participant

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<sup>38</sup> See also p.12; pp.24-5; pp.84-5 and p.306.

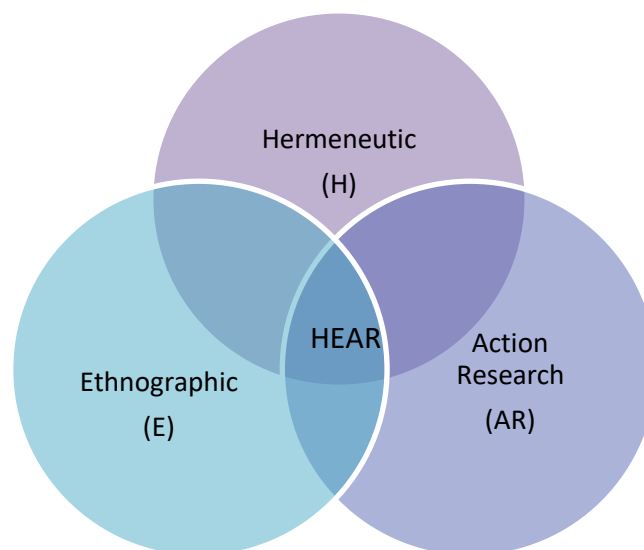
<sup>39</sup> See pp.48-9 for explanation of how this was complementary to my main study and helped inform my methodology.

observer to avoid being perceived as an outside expert. The insider role has also influenced my choice of participants, who I have drawn from three sources: 1) projects delivered by organisation(s) where I was employed; 2) projects where I have been invited to join, through being identified by staff as an 'insider', an Environmental Youth Worker who has had similar experiences to them and is part of their wider community; and 3) organisations working collaboratively with the previously identified organisations/projects, who viewed me as an insider due to my relationship with that organisation.

The early stages of my study enabled me to test the Listening Guide as a means of analysing my data. During this testing phase, I also used it on myself by writing a short reflective piece on my own relationship with nature. This experience led to me deciding not to continue with this for the subsequent phases of my research. However, it also resulted in me embracing a more reflective approach to my third research question and choosing to add autoethnography to my methodology (Decision 4 in Figure 2, Decision Tree). In the next section, I focus on how autoethnography blends with critical realism and action research to enable me to effectively address my research questions.

Ethnographic action research fits well with Youth Work (as defined by Smith, 1996; 2001; 2007), with its dependence on praxis: the combination of theory and practice, and its highly reflexive nature. An Ethnographic Action Research (EAR) paradigm is based on combining ethnography and action research, using '...ethnography to guide the research process and [...] action research to link the research back to the

project's plans and activities' (Tacchi, Slater and Hearn, 2003, p.1). Throughout my study, I have instinctively and intuitively used a very questioning approach. I did not initially recognise this as hermeneutics; it was only following discussions at a conference in summer 2014 that I recognised this is what I had been doing. This led to Decision 5 (Figure 2, Decision Tree). Choosing to embrace a hermeneutic enquiry approach allowed my enquiry to be guided by the topic which '...arrive[ed] with the experience of an address' (Moules, et al. 2014, p.1). An address is something that breaks into our regular routine, into our practice and causes us to stop, listen and to question. This is what happened to me: as an environmental youth worker, I was fully committed to being concerned about young people's dis/connection to nature and to looking for solutions for it. It was when I stepped out of the practitioner role and into a researcher role that I began to question and to challenge if it was an issue. My research paradigm (model) is therefore HEAR (hermeneutic, ethnographic, action research) Figure 3, explored further in Chapter 4 (pp.114-5).



**Figure 3: Diagrammatic representation of my methodology**

The inherent challenges within this paradigm may be: lack of objectivity or impartiality (being too involved); ethical/moral issues regarding researching own and colleagues' practice; and organisational issues regarding what is ethical and permissible within the setting. However, with careful consideration, honesty and integrity these can be overcome, and the resultant research can be powerful and effective within a specific context.

This highlights the other fundamental element within my research: axiology. I am a values-driven person. It is important to acknowledge this as it impacts on both my methodological and theoretical choices, and on my practice. Wherever possible I adopted a participatory approach to my research, which went beyond participant checking of interview transcriptions and findings, to a more exhaustive sharing of all stages of my research: from how best to gather/elicit data, to the presentation and sharing of findings. I overtly share the process, the *messiness* of my research. In this way, my research can be viewed as an ongoing conversation. I am not aiming to produce generalised conclusions or specific recommendations, but to make suggestions and generate discussion topics, to continue and extend the conversation.

I was also aware by adopting a hermeneutic enquiry approach to my overall aim of understanding young people's relationship with nature, as explained by Nixon (2014), that more questions may become the outcomes of my enquiry.

## Methods

My method for eliciting data was based on viewing young people's relationship with nature through four lenses: literature; practitioners; young people and me. This is an approach recommended by Brookfield (1995) and endorsed by Bassot (2016) for critically reflecting on teaching practice, to enable us to examine our assumptions and values, and to identify the power inherent in situations. Before moving on to explain how I have collected my 'data' it is important to define what the term means within this study.

**Data:** 'Facts or information used as a basis for discussing or deciding something, or prepared for being processed [...] an item of information' (OEED, 2011, p.152). In more academic terms, data provides evidence to support the claims and statements we are making, and the ideas, theories and arguments subsequently constructed upon them (for example, see Sarah J. Tracy, 2013, pp.275-7). I will return to this discussion in Part Three (p.267) as I reflect on my findings.

## Data collection methods

I have used a range of data elicitation / collection tools to capture and '... make the most of the information available' (Tracy, *Ibid.*, p.26). Tracy refers to this process as 'bricolage', and highlights it enables a researcher to creatively and flexibly '...create an interesting whole' (*Ibid.*, p.26). She further asserts '*...qualitative researchers find meaning by writing the meaning into being*' (*Ibid.*, p.275; her original emphasis in italics.) I add to this by stating that a storied approach, embracing socio-narratology (as defined and explored by Frank, 2012), provides additional data in the form of



stories. The stories created and shared within my study are more than mere artefacts.<sup>40</sup> They form part of the data set.

In my study, I have included documentary data, interviews, observational and focus group data, with a mix of semi-structured and naturalistic interviewing, depending on the participants involved. To this, I have added stories, anecdotes, memories and reflections – used to highlight and explore themes/issues in more detail as they emerged, and to provide context within the broader aims of my study. This means that throughout my study there have been two concurrent processes: (1) data elicitation through primary and secondary research and (2) employing writing inquiry as a research method:

‘...the data collection process is often intertwined and interactive with data analysis and interpretation. In other words, these activities often take place concurrently or inform each other in a web-like fashion’ (Bath, 2009).

When planning my methods for data elicitation and analysis I was aware of ethical considerations, as highlighted by Anderson (1999, p.65): ‘Researchers have the power to misrepresent and abuse subjects when they interpret, selectively report and publicise the data...’ (see also Lounasmaa, 2016). Therefore, I endeavoured to collect and then to represent participants’ views as accurately as possible, whilst maintaining their anonymity (see Chapter 3, p.59). I was also conscious to avoid asking leading or value-laden questions, but to allow participants the opportunity to present their own opinions. I echo the words of Carl Rogers (1975, p.1), when ‘...in doubt as to what I should do, in some active way, I listened.’ I conducted my

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<sup>40</sup> An artefact is an object made by a human (OEED, 2011, p.33).

research by working alongside and/or visiting existing projects, managed and co-ordinated by a range of practitioners. My role was clearly defined as a researcher and I was not responsible for co-ordinating the activities. Where possible, when attending activities with young people, I assumed the role of participant observer to enable me to develop an effective research relationship with the participants.

### **Data recording methods**

Interviews and focus groups were recorded using a digital voice recorder and then saved to a password protected computer. I was conscious some may feel uncomfortable with the use of voice recorder,<sup>41</sup> and offered each person the choice as to whether to use it or not. I showed them the recorder, explained how it worked, and invited them to show me where they would like it to be placed during the interview (for example: out of sight, under a chair; or in full view, on a table). In practice, I found it appeared to have no negative impact on conversations, and enabled me to remain focused on the person I was with, rather than being distracted by the need to take notes. All participants were given information on the project, and gave informed consent prior to the interview. They also chose the location for the interview, and whether they wanted anyone else to be present (for example, other young people or practitioners).

After the interviews, I captured my thoughts and observations in my field notebook, along with my initial reflections and analysis in the form of short stories and anecdotes. This helped me to develop my understanding through ongoing analysis

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<sup>41</sup> This consciousness comes both from consulting literature on the use of recorders, and my own experience of not being comfortable with hearing my own voice.

of my data, and is an example of how writing formed part of the process of my inquiry (Richardson, 2000).

### **Data analysis methods**

My research data was initially analysed using guidance from the Listening Guide (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008). This is an interpretive, relational approach that creates I-poems. I selected this method as it is a recognised and respected method within qualitative research that places the emphasis on the participant's voice, not the researcher's. The Listening Guide was developed by Brown and Gilligan (1991), and has been subsequently used and adapted in '...diverse multi-disciplinary projects [which] provides a way of working reflexively with both critical and constructed subjects and with translating epistemological conceptions of relational narrated subjects into research practice' (Doucet and Mauthner, op. cit., p.7).

I chose to use the more recent version, adapted by Doucet and Mauthner, who advocate flexibility when following the Listening Guide, depending on the nature of the topic under consideration, and the depth of analysis required. For in-depth research, they advise four separate readings of a narrative:

- Reading 1: Relational and reflexively constituted narratives – this is a reflexive reading of narrative combining the basic grounded theory question, which is 'what is happening here?' with elements from narrative analysis such as an interest in recurring words, themes, events, chronology of events, protagonists, plot, subplots, and key characters.
- Reading 2: Tracing narrated subjects – this step attends to the subject or narrator in the interview transcripts, and to how this person speaks about

her/himself and the parameters of their social world. This involves ‘tracing’ the use of the word ‘I’, providing subjects with identities, and allow them to speak about who they believe they are. From this tracing, an I-poem is created.

- Reading 3: Reading for relational narrated subjects – this focuses on social networks, and close and intimate relations.
- Reading 4: Reading for structured subjects – this focuses on structured power relations and dominant ideologies that frame narratives.

This is a very thorough, albeit time-consuming process, and was not appropriate in its entirety for this early phase of my research, whilst I was testing its appropriateness as a method for analysis. I therefore employed the first two readings and then moved into a more general analysis of emergent themes from the I-poems. I found it to be an effective and creative method, especially for identifying individual contributions within a focus group. Conversely, I found it removed too much of the relational aspects of the interview – the interaction between me and the participant. I discovered a storied approach, enabling both data elicitation and interpretation through creative writing, was a more effective method to remain focused on my research aims.

### **Testing I-poem analysis**

During the initial phase of my study, I wrote a story of my experiences in nature (self-narrative) which I then analysed to create an I-poem (Appendix i). This enabled me to gain an understanding of the process, and of how it felt to undergo this form of analysis. My initial finding was that when reading the poem afterwards, I felt exposed and vulnerable. I reflected on this experience, explored why I felt this way,

and then I chose to address my feelings through discussion with my supervisors, colleagues and critical friends. When we remove the language that we use to 'package' our innermost feelings, the voice we leave is clear and distinct – and very personal. Testing the method on myself, heightened my awareness of the need for great care and sensitivity when using it with research participants, especially with young people who have been experiencing difficulties in their personal lives (for example, young people who are in, or preparing to leave, the care system).

Another significant finding from the early phases of my research and the complementary study, was that the young people I spoke with struggled to verbally explain their experiences: many of them had limited vocabulary or ability to conceptualise; some were unable to speak at all, for example, young people with special education needs and/or disabilities (SEN/D). However, participating alongside them, engaging in informal conversations and observing them in action, enabled me to elicit data for my research. This shift in methods eventually led to me deciding to fully commit to an alternative, storied approach (Decision 6 in Figure 2, Decision Tree).

### **Complementary research – DTLLS Action Research Study**

I conducted an informal focus group with young people on their experiences in school/college of participating in alternative education programmes. This data was generated through a separate, distinct piece of work, on behalf of my previous employer, a youth-work charity based in the Midlands of England. The data was gathered as part of DTLLS qualification, which I have completed alongside my PhD.

Although the focus of this research was not directly related to my PhD research (i.e. not related to an outside space) the subject matter being investigated was, and the participants fitted the demographic for my primary research. This small research study provided an insight into the world of young people who are experiencing some form of exclusion from mainstream, statutory education: an increasingly important area within my work. Their stories provided me with a greater opportunity to test the method of I-poem analysis, and the feedback from my DTLLS tutor helped me to evaluate the effectiveness of this method. My conclusion is that whilst I may use this form of analysis in future research studies, I decided not to continue with it for my doctoral study.

The preliminary research phases enabled me to test my methods, explore and develop my methodology and refine my overall research design. Individual reports were shared with participating organisations, summarising their organisation's involvement, and practitioners were interviewed on their response to these initial findings (see p.56). I also interpreted my findings through creative writing, which I shared through presentations at conferences and seminars. This enabled me to test both my emergent findings, and my method of interpreting/presenting them.

### **Data presentation methods**

My stories and fables are based on specific incidents within my research, which I refer to as magic moments: the moments when things seem to 'fall into place'. A more conventional academic term for this is crystallization; as Robson explains, 'Such crystallizations range from the mundane to the '...earthshattering epiphany' (Fetterman, 1989, p.101) after which nothing is the same' (Robson, 2002, pp.488-9).

I am conscious I have used the terms story, fable and anecdote in an interchangeable manner, and only briefly explored them in the last chapter (p.15), so I will pause here to define them more carefully. Figure 4 (p.52) shows the different forms of stories and the relationship between them. I have included Myths, Legends and Fairy-tales within the diagram, to show I am aware of these as forms of stories, however they are not used within this thesis as they represent *extraordinary* stories (my emphasis in italics). Once upon a time, people may have been believed them to be true but, today they are viewed as the realm of fantasy. Whilst we may draw from some of the techniques used to create these fantastical stories, this is not an appropriate method of making sense of carefully collected data. To ensure consistency, for each term, I start with how it is defined in the Oxford *Essential* English Dictionary (OEED) (2011, my italics) before moving on to contextualise how each term is applied within my research.

**Story:** can be fictional, nonfictional or a blend; it can be unimaginatively told (for example: an account or report) or it can be imaginatively told, using creative writing techniques (for example: a tale or amusing anecdote). As stated earlier (p.15) the OEED (Ibid., p.584) definition of story is: 'an account of an incident or of a series of incidents, either true or invented'. Frank (2012, p.2) highlights that as well as a means of providing information, stories '...give form – temporal and spatial orientation, coherence, meaning intention, and especially boundaries – to lives which inherently lack form'. He further argues '...human life depends on the stories we tell: the sense of self that those stories impart, the relationships constructed

around shared stories, and the sense of purpose that stories both propose and foreclose' (Ibid., p.3).

**Tale:** 'A narrative or story, especially one imaginatively told' (OEED, op. cit., p.605).

Like Van Maanen (2011, p.8) I use the term in deference to the 'inherent story-like character of fieldwork accounts'. My fables can be considered a type of tale (see Figure 4, p.52).

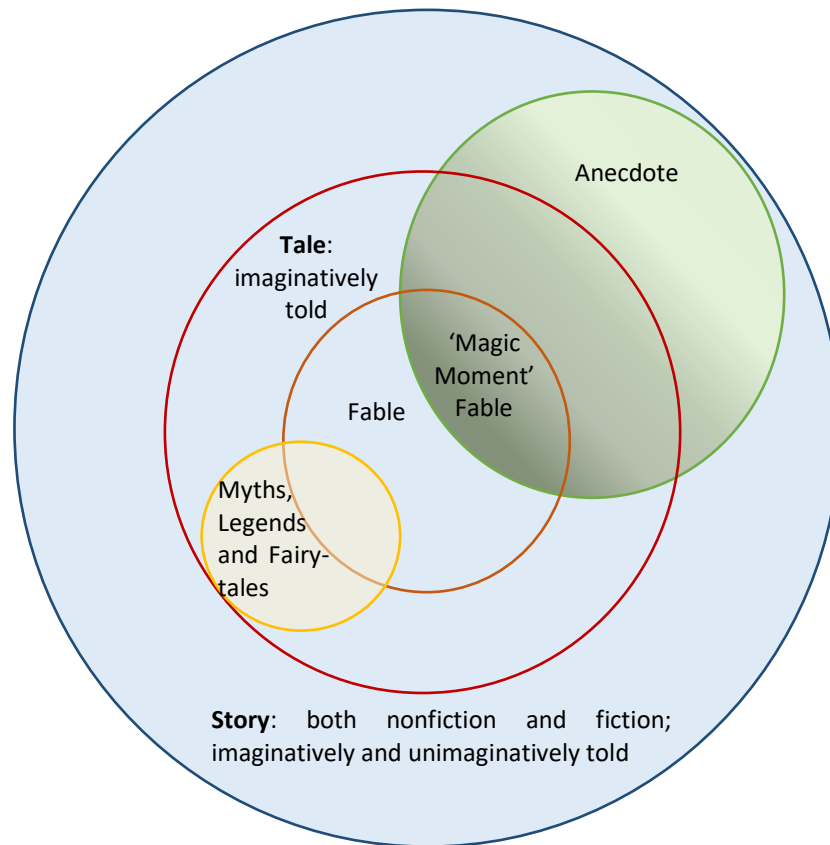
**Anecdote:** 'A short entertaining story about a real person or event' (OEED, op. cit., p.22). Gallop (2002) within her 'anecdotal theory' explains anecdotes enable us to concisely narrate a single event, a moment, in a way which allows us to read it for theoretical insights. It provides a way of '...theorizing which honours the uncanny detail of lived experience' (Ibid., p.2). I make use of anecdotes further in Part Three (pp.272-275) as I pull together and discuss the overall findings from my study, relating them to pivotal conversations which informed my work.

**Fable:** As stated earlier (p.15) the OEED (op. cit., p.212) definition of fables is: a '... short story, usually with animals as characters, intended to convey a moral'.

**'Magic Moment' Fable:** a short story, imaginatively told, that interprets a moment which I subjectively perceive as significant. It conveys a lesson, a moment from which we can learn.

See Figure 4 (below) for the inter-relationship between these terms.





**Figure 4: Diagrammatic illustration of the relationship between the different forms of story, as used in this thesis.**

### Research Participants

I am one of the research participants, as there is an autoethnographical strand to my work, with one of the three research questions (p.18) aiming to understand how I make sense of nature. The other participants in my study were young people aged 11-25; practitioners / project staff (paid and voluntary) who support/work with them outdoors; and staff from the organisations, schools and colleges where the research projects took place (see Table 2, p.54 for summary of my fieldwork). They were recruited through my contact with the projects that work with them and were supported throughout by the practitioners responsible for the projects.

Prior to including a project (and the people participating in it) within my study, I reviewed information on their projects to ensure they met the criteria for my study. The unifying criteria was that the projects took place outside (in nature) and involved young people within the stated age range (11-25).

The project workers discussed my involvement with potential participants and provided them with my introduction letter and information sheet. If they agreed to participate, the project workers arranged for me to meet them, either during project sessions, or associated focus groups/project meetings/youth club sessions. I followed guidance from the practitioners who were responsible for them as to the most appropriate way of working with them. Some of the participants may be defined as vulnerable due to their current/past life experiences; others had a range of physical disabilities, educational/learning, emotional or behavioural issues. This impacted on my methodological choices, particularly with regards to moral and ethical decisions.

In Table 2 (below) I have identified the focus of each organisation as either Youth or Conservation: this choice is based on documentation from the project (and its supporting organisation). I have also categorised them as urban, rural or coastal, depending on the location of the projects that I included in my fieldwork.

**Table 2: Summary of fieldwork**

Organisation		Date	Adults	Young People	data
Rural Youth development organisation					
Mar 13 – Oct 14	Individual interviews and participant observations		3 interviewed	5 interviewed	interviews, anecdotes, observations and field notes
	Reflective contribution to autoethnography				
Coastal conservation organisation					
Visit 1	Practitioner and Volunteer	Sep-13	2	0	interview and field notes
Visit 2	Practitioner (2nd interview) and Volunteer	Apr-14	2	0	interview and field notes
	Partner organisation	Apr-14	2	6	focus group and field notes
	School	Apr-14	3	6	interviews, focus group and field notes
Sep 13 – Jan 15	Online and phone contact with project worker Reflective contribution to autoethnography				
Urban conservation organisation					
Project 1	School – PMLD and SEN/D <sup>42</sup>	Mar-14 to Jun14	6	15+	observations and field notes; interview with project worker
Project 2	Youth Club and guides	Jun-14 to Oct-14	2	8	interviews and field notes
Project 3	School – PMLD and SEN/D	Apr-15 to Jun-15	10+	30+	observations and field notes
Jan 14 – April 16	Online and phone contact with project worker Reflective contribution to autoethnography Practitioner toolkit and CPD workshop				Field notes, Workshop plan, report and Toolkit
European and global perspectives					
Initial discussions at seminar in Iceland, continued by email and via social media (Facebook, Twitter). Discussions, seminars and workshops at conferences throughout study, listed in outputs.					

<sup>42</sup> PMLD - severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties; SEN/D - special education needs and/or disabilities.

It may have been easier and more convenient to work with only one project, in one location, which would have provided an interesting depth to the data, offering a very contextualised and rich understanding of the topic. However, it would also have provided a more restricted interpretation of the subject, which would be difficult to apply to other contexts, and therefore this was not appropriate to meet my specific research aims.

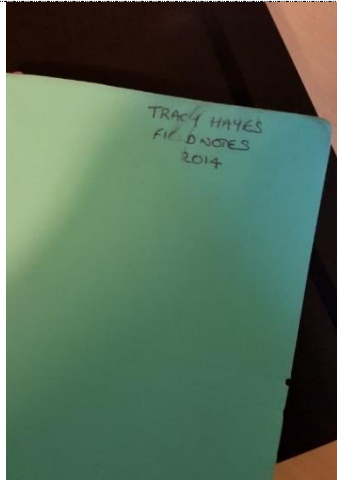
I have summarised my experiences and discoveries from my fieldwork in the next chapter.

### **Chapter 3: From Primary Data to Stories**

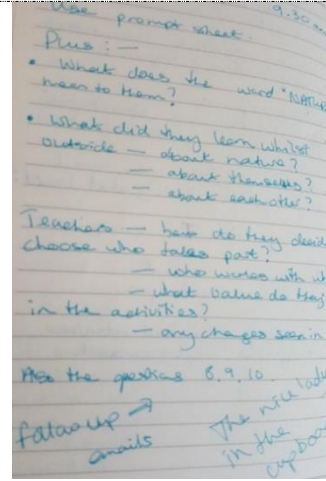
This chapter summarises my primary research findings from my fieldwork. It is predominantly a descriptive account, with initial analysis to show how this relates to my overall thesis. My aim here is to show you where I went, who I spoke with, what I learned from them and how this contributed to my doctoral study. The chapter is divided into sections, focusing on each of the locations for my fieldwork:

- Rural – ongoing data elicitation/collection and analysis. I was based at this organisation between March 2013 and October 2014, and my findings and interpretations were shared with them through supervisory meetings, internal and external reports/presentations and project summaries. This is a concise section, focused on showing a sample from an interview transcript.
- Urban – regular visits from January 2014 until April 2016, with a mix of informal interviews and conversations, emails, phone calls and participant observation. The organisation was provided with one comprehensive report, covering all my visits, part of which has been provided here in a revised format focused on one visit, within one project, near the start of my time with them.
- Coastal – two visits in September 2013 and April 2014. The organisation was provided with two in-depth reports (one per visit), which have been provided here in a collated and revised format.

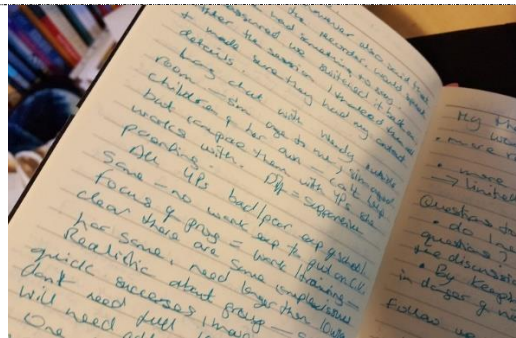
I made brief notes during meetings, and reflections immediately afterwards in my green field notebook (see below). On my return home, I continued to reflect on my experiences, writing more reflective notes and short stories in my PhD journal (black notebook below), which focused on specific moments/conversations which became my magic moments and anecdotes.



**Image 2: Green field notebook and black research journal.**

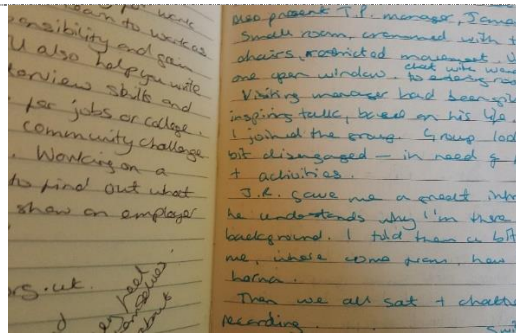


**Image 3: Field notebook extract 1**  
Brief notes during field visits



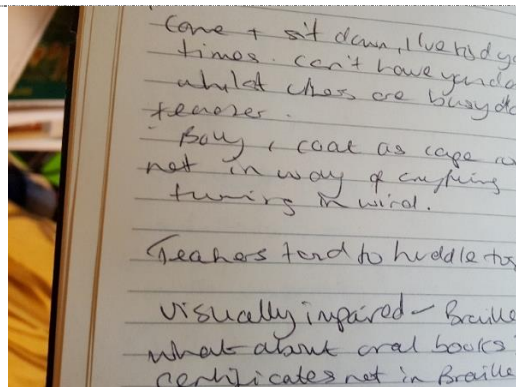
Initial reflections from meetings.

**Image 4: Field notebook extract 2**



Mix of notes and reflections from meetings.

**Image 5: Field notebook extract 3**



Contemplating my visits and making links to practice. Thinking about inclusion and accessibility, plus the role of the facilitator(s).

**Image 6: Reflective Journal extract 1**

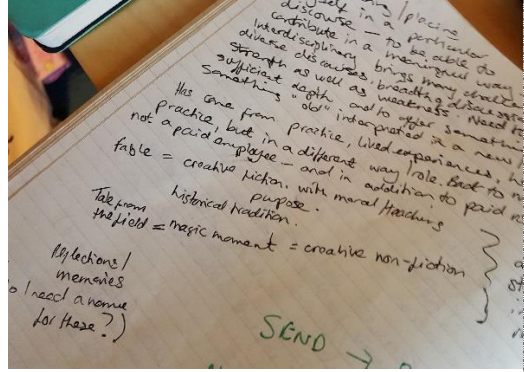


Image 7: Reflective Journal extract 2

Continuing contemplation on my visits and making links to practice.

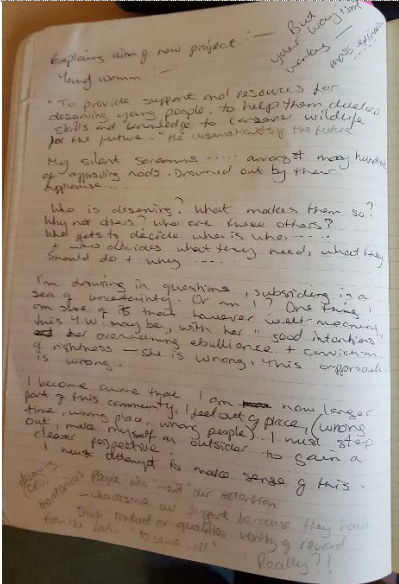


Image 8: Reflective Journal extract 3

Memories of listening to young woman explain her new project which aimed to connect young people to nature by providing support and resources to 'deserving' young people. Reflexively questioning her aim, her choice of language and comparing this to my experiences and research findings. What makes one person more *deserving* than another? How does this relate to initiatives aimed at widening/encouraging participation?

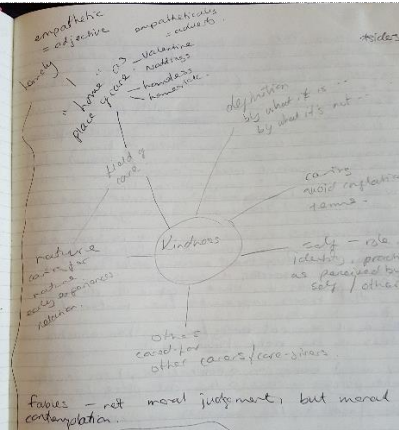
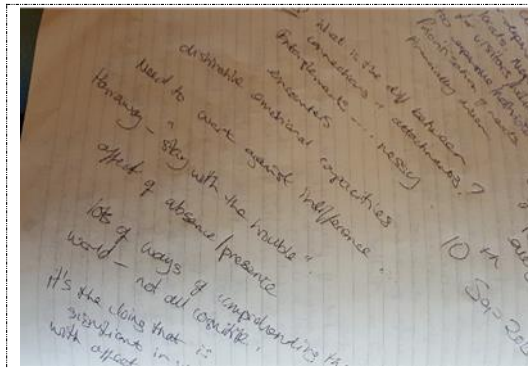


Image 9: Reflective Journal extract 4

Exploring the concept of kindness, in relation to my findings. Continuing to think about 'fables'.



**Image 10: Reflective Journal extract 5**

Revisiting experiences more than a year later; synthesis with other experiences, reflection and reading.

I took on the role of participant observer at the rural and urban locations, thereby adding to my methods with observations, anecdotes and post-session reflections. There was also ongoing dialogue with practitioners by email and phone, which were incorporated into my reflective journal. Utilising these methods, data was continually being collected, elicited and analysed, not through separate stages, but through an iterative, reflexive process. Combined with applying the theory of writing as a method of inquiry, some of the most resonant themes formed the basis for my stories and conference presentations. All references to individuals, organisations and locations have been anonymised to respect confidentiality and/or privacy.

### **Rural Location**

I was based at this location for over 18 months, participating in and observing many different programmes. In addition to numerous naturalistic conversations and observations which inveigled their way into my thinking, I conducted eight individual interviews, three with practitioners and five with young people. Due to limitations of space and the need to avoid inadvertently providing identifiable information, in this section I provide an extract from the transcript of an interview



with one of the practitioners, prior to analysis, to demonstrate this initial phase of working with my data. I provide greater detail on the two other locations, as my contact with them was more limited, therefore there is less chance of the participants being identifiable.

**Exemplar section from interview transcript:**

T: Do you think it's important we do things like this, with young people?

N: Yes, I think so, ermm... I know we use a lot of outdoor activities and it makes young people feel good, and they get a lot of fun and excitement out of it. But it's very good 'cos we can use it as metaphors to discuss other challenges in their lives and it's very good for explaining how to goal set and talking about resilience, and how they pick themselves up from a literal fall, on the side of a hill, so you can actually use real comparisons. But in terms of the social side, a lot of the young people we work with don't get to meet friends and they don't get to explore nature with other young people, and having them together on a residential with like-minded young people means that they can, you know, experience nature which's on their doorstep. I think it's really important, 'cos living in a house, you know, 24/7 with all their creature comforts, many of them want to experience what it's like to have an adventure. I think, rather than them seeing it as they're being at one with nature, it's wow there's a big adventure playground out there. It just happens to be called nature and they can access it when they want.

T: So it's kind'a the language you're using then? Is it about how we... does it matter what words we use?

N: Yeah, I think so, because if we were to say let's go on a conservation day, we'd only get certain types of young people who would want to do that. And typically, it would be the ones who were interested in that, or were part of a group, or doing the John Muir or something like that. Whereas if it's phrased as we're going on an adventure... let's just go out there, outside [anon.] is a playground, what can we do in it? And we use the words challenges, you know, mountain [anon.] is a challenge, and that not many people climb that. So, yeah, these types of word get them excited. 'Cos, I think they just see it as something that's really fun for them. But at the end of it, we can review it with them, and say look what you've actually done. It's quite a big thing, a big achievement.

## **Urban Location**

Conservation Charity has several projects within their overall youth engagement programme called 'Let's get Wild'.<sup>43</sup> This programme has been funded by the BIG Lottery<sup>44</sup> to provide an opportunity to access outdoor learning in the area.<sup>45</sup> It is designed to work with schools and groups to increase opportunities for children and young people to learn, enjoy and participate in educational activities in local natural spaces; thereby increasing skills, well-being and providing opportunities to achieve. In this section, I report on my first project with them; the organisation was provided with a comprehensive summary report (see p.56) on each project.<sup>46</sup> I have avoided using direct quotes from young people and staff, as my observations were recorded post-sessions I did not feel able to do this accurately. I refer to the project worker by the pseudonym Amy.

## **First project within the Urban Conservation Programme**

This section focuses on one project that involved working with Parker School,<sup>47</sup> a specialist school in the area (anon.). The students who attend Parker School have all been assessed as having severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties. They have a statement of Special Educational Needs before admission, and the admission process is managed by the local authority (LA).

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<sup>43</sup> Pseudonym.

<sup>44</sup> For more information on the Big Lottery, please see URL: <https://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/about-big>. Last Viewed 31/07/2017

<sup>45</sup> Anonymised.

<sup>46</sup> Not included in full here due to space restrictions.

<sup>47</sup> Pseudonym.

In addition to severe or profound learning difficulties the students may have other learning needs such as:

- Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD);
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD);
- Visual and/or Auditory Impairment;
- Medical or Health Difficulties;
- Behavioural or Social Difficulties.

The school adapts to meet the needs of the individual student as far as is practicable. Teachers and learning support staff work very much in partnership with parents and professionals to meet the complex needs, and to provide the best learning environment possible for each student.

*Project Outline: a description of what was delivered*

The project was delivered over four sessions, two in February and two in March 2014 and we worked with 15 young people (YPs), 5 males and 11 females all aged 13/14 years old. This section provides an in-depth description of the second session. I have included data that some people may view as trivial; however, it may prove useful for future analysis.<sup>48</sup>

***Session overview***

The session was attended by a mix of staff – qualified teachers, teaching assistants and volunteers – and occasionally by medical/nursing staff. As with session 1, the number of young people participating fluctuated during the day – for example, when we arrived we were informed that YPs 1 and 2 were in the hydrotherapy pool;

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<sup>48</sup> I provide detailed information on this project to illustrate my methodological approach, provide context for my reflections and to help build a strong narrative flow to my written thesis. Subsequent projects/visits to this organisation were treated in a similar way, though not included here, due to lack of space.

having spent much of the last two days in their chairs on visits outside the classroom they needed some specific stimulation and therapy.

#### *What happened?*

We arrived at the school whilst the YPs were in assembly, which allowed us time to discuss plans for the session with the teacher, and Amy gave him an outline of the day. The weather was good – sunny, but cold. Once the YPs joined us, we started by talking about the last session – could they remember what we had done? Most needed prompting, but some did remember, especially hugging (kissing!) the trees. We assisted them to draw a picture in their books: most opted for trees, with sky. They needed considerable help with this. One female (YP 5) asked me to write words so that she could go over them; the teacher advised me to do this in dots (as they do). YP 5 then coloured over each letter – vaguely in the shape of the letter. The teacher spotted this and corrected her; this highlighted the need for awareness of individual ability to ensure their learning develops and progresses. Unfortunately, this is not something we have the time to do here, and highlights the importance of working closely with teaching staff.

The YPs had a break for biscuits, fruit and juice/milk then we got ready to go outside. YP 4 did not want to go – asked to stay and do written work – the teacher quietly explained to us that he had been having a difficult week, dealing with problems at home, resulting in emotional outbursts in school. His behaviour had been improving, however is now less consistent and he needs more support. He had been allowed to play games on the I-pad whilst we ran the early activities and he wanted to continue with this. I had observed him doing this, and he demonstrated

ability to concentrate and focus, was fully engaged in the task. We took turns to talk with him, explaining what we would be doing, and encouraging him to join in – an attempt to show him that we valued his participation and did not want him to miss out. Eventually this was successful and we left the school.

We walked across to the park – the YPs who needed support were given it (supportive arm). YP 3 was reluctant to walk, appearing to tire before we had even left the grounds. She had two workers, one on each arm, encouraging (at times half-dragging) her; despite this she kept trying to sit on the ground. For a while the male teacher gave her a piggy-back, which she appeared to like – from the way they both behaved it appeared to be a regular occurrence – good job the teacher is strong!

The others all walked well and seemed excited about the trip. Amy had a good range of activities at the park including a repeat of meet a tree (with bigger trees) and plaster casts of animal prints. On arrival at the park YP 3 was excited at the sight of the mud and puddles – she picked up a stick and started stirring a muddy puddle as if it was porridge. She also stamped in the mud, appearing to enjoy the feel and sound it made. She looked happy and relaxed. A couple of other girls joined her, and things got a bit livelier – she got very excited and tried to draw with a muddy stick on one of the other's arms (on her coat) – much squealing. Then she was removed from the area by staff – she didn't like this.

YP 3 was caught throwing sticks, angry/frustrated at being removed from the muddy puddles, and was taken to one side to recover. She sat on a bench with a teaching assistant (TA), watching the others, and passers-by. An older lady, with grandchild walked by, the toddler stopping to look at the YP. The grandmother appeared in a rush (or perhaps uncomfortable?) and encouraged the child to move

on, which resulted in the child having a tantrum – sitting on the ground crying. YP 3 responded by picking up a stick and walking over to the child – she crouched down at eye level, maintained eye contact with the toddler, and handed him her stick. The child instantly stopped crying and smiled back at her. He stood up, proudly holding his stick and walked over to his grandmother – he then happily walked off with his stick clasped firmly in his hand. YP 3 sat back down, visibly more relaxed, then spotted two dogs walking past with their owner. She engaged the owner in a conversation about the dogs, calmly stroking them and talking to them. She was like a different person.

Whilst this was happening the rest of the group continued with the activities, including also talking to dog walkers and fussing their dogs. A lot of time was spent looking at dogs, talking to their owners, and fussing the dogs! Most of the YPs appeared more comfortable with me and Amy – asking us questions and involving us in their games. Two plaster casts were made of a dog's paw print and Amy's boot. We also made sound sticks by attaching twine to sticks so that they could then tie on items they found. These were meant to represent sounds that they heard, for example a leaf to show they have heard them rustle. I supported some YPs with this, helping to look for things and tying the knots. There was lots of eye contact, hand movements, stroking of my arm, pointing to emphasise things - especially when vocal communication was limited.

Then we walked back to school for lunch break, again YP 3 was reluctant to walk, and was carried by the teacher for much of the way. I followed behind, talking to some of the other teachers – I asked if there was a medical/physical reason that made it difficult for YP to walk. No, she just wasn't used to it, didn't walk much.

Mother has limited mobility, uses walking sticks, so mostly drives/rarely walks; father is big and strong and carries his daughter when needed. The school is trying to get her used to walking, but it is something new to her.

We left them to have lunch in the school hall. We ate ours in the park, watching the ducks on the pond; then we walked around the park looking for somewhere nearer the entrance, where we could hold the afternoon's session (less walking). We found some huge pinecones and gathered them up to take back with us. We returned to the school, and met the specialised assistant who is responsible for wheelchair users within the school. We discussed plans for the afternoon – she was concerned that YPs 1 and 2 had wet hair from the hydrotherapy pool and questioned us on whether we had specific, adapted activities for 'the girls'.<sup>49</sup> Amy responded calmly that she thought we could use the boards that rest on the chairs, and provide items from the park to look at; they would also be able to experience the weather. The specialist teacher began preparing them to go outside: however, the first to be dressed did not co-operate, her fingers went very stiff, and she kept moving her hands away as gloves were being put on. It then became apparent that neither YP 1 nor YP 2 had been fed (nurse arrived with feeding equipment) so we all agreed that we should go on to the park, then they would join us.

YP 3 was driven across the road to the entrance of the park, and encouraged to walk the last few metres – which she did. Amy had planned for us to do some mini-beast and worm hunts and had some magnifying pots for close-ups. This was a very popular activity – all joined in – lots of squealing when worms and spiders were

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<sup>49</sup> Her way of referring to them.

found! Some of the YPs did not like these at first, however they became braver and were able to touch them. The teacher asked me to work with one of the quieter girls (YP 5) within the group, however she refused to engage with me, ignoring me, unresponsive and not moving, until her usual support worker came to her side. But then, why should she? She doesn't know me, and does not know how I work – understandably she opted for someone she does know. I moved on to the other young people, chatting to them about what they had found, how many legs, etc.

YP 3 loved the worms – I took them in my hands to show her, and she asked to hold them. I gently transferred them from my hands to hers, cupping her hand with mine as she held it – explaining the need to be gentle so as not to squish them. She maintained eye contact with me as I explained this, then focussed all her attention on the worms. She showed great delight in them, very gently moving them between her hands and allowing them to explore between her fingers. She then decided she wanted to make them a home – passing them back to me to hold, whilst she dug a hole beneath tree for them. She placed them in the hole – but then changed her mind, and got them out again to hold. This process was repeated several times. I suggested we find a better home for them, in damper ground, away from the tree – she agreed and we moved onto the grass. I crouched down and began to dig – she joined me and asked to sit on my knee. I laughed and said I thought I'd probably fall over if she did this – then something happened – did she urinate/defecate (she wears a nappy)? She stood up, her whole body shivered; she shook her legs then walked stiffly towards her assistant, calling her name. I followed at a slight distance, checking she was ok.



It was nearing the end of the session, so I quietly explained the situation to Amy, we gathered up the equipment and began to walk back to school. YP 3 appeared to perk up a bit, and called to me to join her, "*Tracy, come 'ere!*" and holding out her hand to me. We walked together back to the car, then she was driven to school while I continued to walk.

The teacher walked with me and explained some of the challenges of working with PMLD – the endless forms to enable YPs to leave the classroom/school; how to play games such as eye-spy, adapting to meet their needs. He has chosen to specialise in SEN/D and clearly enjoys his work. He also explained about two of the young people, YP3 and YP 4: they were the only school in the area that would take them on, both YPs had been refused admission by every other school, and had been described as 'Devil Children'. Parker School felt able to accommodate them, as they have specialist, experienced staff and believed they could help them. Much work has been undertaken to help the YPs rebuild their damaged self-esteem and self-confidence; he feels they have been very damaged by their earlier experiences.

I talked with one of the younger members of staff who is due to start formal teacher training this year. I explained about my research, and where this project fitted in. Then I chatted with one of the other teachers who told me she was tired, hadn't done this much walking for ages – I jokily offered to take her back to the Lakes with me for some more walking and she said she didn't meant *that* kind of walking, she had done *that* recently, it was *this* kind of walking she hadn't done recently. This was an interesting distinction, unfortunately we were unable to explore this further due to the need to focus on crossing the road safely.

We returned to the classroom and found YPs 1 and 2. They had stayed in the class, and had been given a 'nature experience': an audio/visual computer presentation, projected onto the screen, of a mountain forest, complete with animal glove puppets and the pinecones we had gathered at lunch. It was very calm and controlled, both girls seemed to be watching and listening to the presentation. One of them, who I had spent time with before, allowed me to place my hand next to hers, and gently touch her fingers – very relaxed and 'playful'. We stayed for a while, helping the young people to do some more work in their record books. YP 5 calls all birds Kevin (a reference to the film 'Up' perhaps? I asked her about this and she said yes, it was).<sup>50</sup> She asked me to draw Kevin in her book - I did this lightly in pencil so that she could go over it and colour it – three others asked me to do the same – a lot of Kevins!

As it was the end of the week, there was a review of the behaviour star chart, with certificates for the two (joint) winners who had the most stars. There was a relaxed, jokey discussion about this: I questioned one of the winners if Amy and I should get a certificate – he was quick to say no, in a playful, teasing way. We said goodbye and left the group. Again, Amy and I reflected on the session in the car. We agreed that if we had waterproofs and wellies for all, it wouldn't matter about rain or mud – less chance of YPs being told off for splashing or getting dirty. She is going to look into this.

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<sup>50</sup> *Up* (2009) Directed by Pete Docter [Film]. Produced by Pixar Animation Studios and released by Walt Disney Pictures.

*What went according to plan, and what was improvised?*

We had to change the afternoon session to reduce the amount of walking involved. We also had to take account of how many dogs and other people were in the park, and be vigilant about their safety – some of the dogs ran up to the YPs, and were a bit over-excited by their squeals. It was unfortunate that YPs 1 and 2 did not join us in the park. Although they could not actively join in the mini-beast hunt, they could have experienced the sights, sounds and feel of the park – the wind and sun on their skin – and the other YPs would have brought things to them. Instead they were provided with an artificial experience, controlled and indoors – safe. However, is that better/more appropriate for them? Am I allowing my values and beliefs to influence my interpretations of the events? Perhaps what they experienced was preferable to them? The fingers (stiff in the morning, relaxed after) linger in my thoughts.

### **Reflection**

Within the class there is a wide range of individual needs. All the children and young people have been assessed as having severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties. Meeting this level of often conflicting needs is a challenge for the teaching staff. I have relatively limited knowledge and experience of working with SEN/D outside of mainstream schools; even less of working with PMLD. I feel unsure of myself, challenged by this, and unclear about the 'best' way to deal with this. Amy's approach is like mine in that we view ourselves as the 'experts on outdoor learning', to be supported by the more specialist teaching staff. Do they agree with this, or do they expect us to provide activities tailored to each child? Would that be a realistic expectation from a 4-week project?

- Thinking about the activities - how are we being inclusive? Are we trying to make these individuals fit within our world or adapting ourselves/our activities to fit theirs?
- My research on voice – how does this project fit? For many of these YPs their voices are mediated/interpreted by the teaching staff. How do I know it is theirs? Does this matter? It highlights the importance of observations, and of being mindful of body language, and other non-verbal methods of communication.

There are interesting links with work I am doing elsewhere with young people who have experienced exclusion.

*What is my learning from this?*

1. To read up on SEN/D, particularly PMLD – talk to colleagues and seek guidance; learn from the teaching staff and young people in this school.
2. Be open and flexible, and above all honest about my knowledge and experience.
3. Patience and respect – for the young people, staff and for myself.
4. Keep open-minded and flexible, and explore with any possible ways of addressing issues.

Session two felt very relaxed and enjoyable – the staff and young people seemed to enjoy being outside – although frustratingly most were still not wearing suitable clothes/shoes: if the teachers don't do it, then neither will the YPs. This is like encounters I have had with non-SEN/D (mainstream) schools and to me, highlights the need to include outdoor learning in teacher training, whatever the specialism.

I felt more confident within the group, I am beginning to understand their individual needs/challenges and feel more able to respond. However, I am also conscious we only have a few weeks with them, and that this is a time-limited relationship. I tend

to hold back and allow them to come to me when they feel ready – I do not believe in being pushy with young people. I believe in being friendly/approachable, smiling a lot and letting the relationship develop on their terms. This is their world and I feel privileged when they let me in, when they include me in what they are doing: something that is easier when I am in my current role. If I was responsible for leading the sessions it may be different – although observing Amy, she appears to work in a similar way, gentle yet firm, not pushy but encouraging. I am enjoying working with her, talking with her about the project and about my research.

I felt that we were forced to work to the lowest physical ability, at the expense of the more physically-able YPs. There is such a wide range within the class, even with individualised support, it is difficult to challenge and stretch the more able. Also, the medical needs tend to dominate - it is sometimes difficult to see past these to the individual within. I can understand how it is easier to provide activities within the school, safe and controlled, managed according to needs. It was more difficult for the staff outside – especially when the group spread out in the park, amongst the public and their dogs. However, I felt frustrated by the situation. I felt the ‘two girls’ missed out on having a genuine experience and that they were ‘short-changed’ with the artificial alternative.

I spent some time talking with the teachers, who suggested I kept coming as a volunteer – unfortunately the commute is too far. It was nice to feel they wanted me, and if it had been closer to home I would have been very tempted. I have reflected on why I feel so drawn to working with groups like this, and have reminded myself that the focus of my research is not SEN/D – this is just one aspect. There are interesting links to a piece of research within my paid researcher role

with D/deaf young people – I am contemplating a form of reverse inclusion, whereby I am setting my research protocol with SEN/D then adding in those without disabilities. This is not something I had set out to do, but I realise it feels ‘right’.<sup>51</sup>

I felt happy with the way I had contributed to Amy’s project, and that I had been able to support her, whilst also observing/talking with people. I have noticed that staff in this school are more tactile with the YPs – lots of eye contact, some hugging, reassuring touches - a sharp contrast from non-SEN/D schools. It feels more natural, caring and supportive.

### **Preliminary analysis and findings**

The methodological aim within this phase of my research was to conduct an evaluation into the use of participant observation as a method of eliciting data, within an ethnographic action research study that uses a range of methods. I feel this was an effective method, approached in a participatory way, in full awareness of potential issues, especially regarding power differentials. Overall, it fits well within an ethnographic action research study and complements my other data elicitation methods. As before, data was analysed using open coding and inductive reasoning, allowing meaning and themes to emerge from the data.

### **Emergent themes**

- The need to involve staff, and provide them with defined roles, especially when there is a high staff to young person ratio.

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<sup>51</sup> By this I mean appropriate for this contextualised study, and a good fit with my personal moral and ethical code (p.38).

- The impact of external, physical factors that limit access to outdoor spaces, for example leaves not being cleared from paths; busy roads; wheelchair accessible spaces.
- The importance of training for teaching staff in preparation for outdoor sessions.
- The impact of bureaucracy (red tape) around external visits – there is an understandable need to protect and ensure safety; however, this appears to be overly time-consuming and restrictive.
- All schools should have sufficient external space – or easy access to it – to allow for everyday play and adventures – so that this is normalised (part of everyday life) not seen as something special or extra. This links to Forest School initiatives.
- Short programmes can act as a catalyst, however more prolonged/sustained contact is preferable to really develop a positive relationship with nature – has greater impact and deeper relationships can form.
- The need for young people (and staff) to be able to relax, de-stress and find some peace outside. This links to mindfulness initiatives.
- It is important to provide opportunities for young people (and adults) to play, to be children – this helps them learn to negotiate the social world. These opportunities should enable: playfulness, spontaneity, freedom, space, creativity and imagination.
- School based programmes need to have strong links with family-based programmes; learning at home, family experiences and parenting have a strong impact on the effectiveness of school-based programmes. Need for an integrated approach (that goes beyond letters from teacher in the reading bag).
- When considering ‘Voice’ we need creative ways to capture the ‘silent’ or ‘silenced’ ones – observation is one method however we need to take care to avoid researcher bias/misinterpretation.
- Education should take a holistic approach – balance between social/emotional/physical needs as well as those identified within the curriculum.
- Young people are being damaged and disadvantaged by the current education system – labelling/writing off/stereotyping of young people at a young age is endemic and needs to be addressed. This links to NEETs initiatives.
- The use of virtual nature – particularly for SEN/D – how effective is this? Is it a viable alternative?
- How to foster familiarity with nature, comfort outdoors – films, books, toys.
- Hands on practical tasks – vocational learning – links to alternative education programmes.

- The role of the facilitator – skill, resourcefulness; being YP-focussed yet politically astute re teachers – juggling act.
- Celebration and recognition of small achievements along the way – progressive, scaffolding of learning.
- Need for fun – release from pressure and stress. How can this be justified within school settings? Does it need to be justified??
- Role of external providers to complement/supplement teaching – how best to integrate this, work collaboratively? Impact of differing values and approaches, how to handle differences? Is it more effective to train teachers to deliver this themselves, on a daily, consistent basis?

There are far too many interesting themes for one PhD project, therefore I will review them alongside my other research projects and some themes may provide the basis for postdoctoral research. My next steps are to:

- Carefully consider the ethics of working with YPs who may not understand the nature of my involvement.
- Establish my own boundaries, be clear about my role as a researcher.

I have included other projects and one-day events from Conservation Charity's 'Let's get Wild' Project' within my PhD research, and interviewed Amy on her thoughts on my interpretations. These were recorded within my field note book and incorporated into my reflective journal.

### **Coastal Location** <sup>52</sup>

The organisation that delivers the Coastal Project has many projects within their overall youth engagement programme. I joined their Coastal Project which was funded by the Big Lottery and was designed to work with schools and groups to

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<sup>52</sup> To respect confidentiality and anonymity, I have removed information that would allow the identification of the organisation, its employees (paid and voluntary) or the participants in their projects.



increase opportunities for children and young people to learn, enjoy and participate in educational activities in local natural spaces; thereby increasing skills, well-being and providing opportunities to achieve. I visited the Coastal Project twice: the first visit, in late autumn 2013, was a scoping meeting to discuss their project to ascertain if it was a good fit with my research. This visit included an interview with Linda, the project worker and one of her volunteers, with collection of documentation, information and promotional materials from the project. The second visit was in spring 2014 and included meeting with Linda and another volunteer, a community-based group and a school.

Information on Coastal Project supplied by Linda (used to promote opportunities to young people):

This outdoor project is running for young people in the [...] area and is inspired by sea and land around us. We explore, discover and enjoy beaches, woods, tracks and other locations along the coast and interpret what we find out along the way.

We visit and experience beaches [...], having the chance to enjoy the freedom of open space in wild sand dunes to the big concrete sea defences that are home to rock pool plants and animals.

We go inland too, to find quiet, natural places that are easy to get to and are in stunning local locations. Discover how and why people and nature have shaped this landscape in the way it is and what we can do to look after the land and sea around us for the future.

Being part of the [...] group means you will:

- Join a small, friendly team (10 max) of a similar age;
- Take part in regular am or pm outdoor sessions for 6 - 12 weeks;
- Visit places that may be new to you;
- Discover wildlife, history and facts that will fascinate you;
- Gain practical skills while making places better for wildlife;
- Have fun doing new things;
- Develop an understanding of local and global
- marine issues;
- Learn about the [...] Sea and coastal wildlife;

- Gain insight into the history of *the area's*<sup>53</sup> fishing industry;
- Share and celebrate your new experiences with others

Project activity ideas include the following:

- Sand, Stone and Shell Art – sculptures, painting and printing
- Making Movies & Images - digital and pinpoint photography
- Conservation Projects – habitat management for wildlife
- Beach Surveys – create and use beach survey forms to record wildlife
- Binoculars, Boats and Birds – journeys made and global links with the sea
- Marine Tucker Trial and Outdoor Cooking – tasting and cooking on a fire
- Sea Sounds – recording sounds and creating a CD for use
- Weather and Waves – windsocks, kites and weather signs

The Coastal Project aims to provide opportunities to:

- Be outdoors in places that are interesting and that may inspire you to go back to in future.
- Learn about *the area's* social history, wildlife and natural heritage. It will deepen your sense of place and your connection with the land and sea.
- Share new found skills and knowledge with others and gain a certificate to highlight what you can do.

## Visit One

This first meeting included an informal joint interview with Linda<sup>54</sup> and her regular volunteer, Paula.<sup>55</sup> I encountered Linda's manager at a conference I attended in March 2013. We had previously worked together within an environmental network, although based in different areas of the country we had collaborated on some national projects. On hearing about my research, she asked me to meet with Linda in late autumn 2013, with a view to the Coastal Project becoming involved in my

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<sup>53</sup> Name of location removed.

<sup>54</sup> Pseudonym.

<sup>55</sup> Pseudonym.

research. Our meeting took place in one of the organisation's environmental education centres, at the end of the day, once colleagues and visitors had left.

It was a relaxed meeting, with us sitting around one table, sipping tea and eating biscuits, getting to know each other and exploring how we could mutually benefit from working together. The transcript from this interview was analysed to create two I-poems. The I-poems were then further analysed using open coding and inductive reasoning, allowing meaning to emerge from the data in the form of key themes to explore further within my research. I present here five extracts from Linda's I-poem:

Extract	<b>I feel really lucky to be able to take part in this<sup>56</sup></b>	Line numbers
1	<p>I feel really lucky to be able to take part in this  I think it's going to be really good  the last project I did, I didn't quite get it  I felt thrown in, wasn't a great time  I want to keep it really simple, how did you feel about being here  tell us what were your favourite activities, would like to do again  anything you would like to learn so we can incorporate it later  any thoughts, comments you'd like to share with us  I think we need to be a bit more analytical about it as we go along  I'd love that, I'm hoping that is what it's going to be  I had a chat with a lad today, he's been on the project  I said to him do you miss it, I thought he's not, it's just come and gone, but he was reflecting  I think, there's too many assumptions aren't there?  I've seen this while I'm doing it  it really breaks my heart, because I think they need this  these projects I run, I am a bit passionate about them I'm afraid  I see them at the beginning and again at the end, see it in the session, the transformation  I want to be able to show, it's just stuff like that, you just know, don't you?</p>	1-18
2	I think they need to come into their comfort zone	38-52

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<sup>56</sup> Here, Linda is talking about being involved in my PhD study.

	<p>even putting wellies on and the waterproofs  they are coming out of their comfort zone, by coming out of school  if they come into a comfort zone, able to achieve so much more  it's about them finding the zone that's all right for them  if I start pushing, they're going to be like, "no, I don't want to do that"  so just gently...that's just experience that, as a practitioner  I don't really, I try not to be a leader  I have to guide them, and they do need that  I can't bear the thought of being a teacher  I try to be part of the group, be with them as an explorer  "let's go and do this, we can go off and do these things if you want",  I never say you've got to do that, or you've got to do that this way  communicating in a way that makes them feel they're doing it themselves  not me, if you know what I mean?</p>	
3	<p>playing is central really, I treat it as play myself,  I like to play, I play along with them, I guide them, helps them be safe  what I've realised is that they like to be away  they can play without being watched, feeling worried by peer group  I was conscious coming back from the beach, kids coming out of school  we were slightly late, some girls were wet, they'd gone in the sea  they'd got spray on them, weren't bothered, I was really impressed  I'm sorry I go off the point, but the play thing, does run right through</p>	76-83
4	<p>I think it's adults generally isn't it  I mean teachers for goodness sake in a classroom not getting out  I know, I think we need a cultural change  we all need to be involved in it, everyone, parents, teachers</p>	124-28
5	<p>I'm gutted, my project is 2 years, I'm not doing everything funders are asking  [...]  they want project forums and stuff, so that young people are leading  but they come and they do their thing, not interested, they just want to go  home  there's aspects of my project that aren't working so well</p>	157-60

### Paula's I-poem

Paula had recently been made redundant and had approached the organisation to offer her time as a volunteer. On meeting her, Linda had quickly identified that her values and approach seemed an ideal fit for the Coastal Project. In Linda's words, facing competition from colleagues for volunteers for their own projects, she

thought “*I’ll have her*”. Linda and Paula were interviewed together; Paula was quiet through much of the interview, silently nodding in agreement with Linda as she spoke about the project. I subsequently extracted her contributions to the discussions to form her I-poem. Although, she may not have used many words, her choice of words and what they convey, resonated deep within me.

### **It’s very chilled and relaxed outside**

It’s very chilled and relaxed outside, away from school,  
I think children are expected to grow up too quickly  
I don’t think they get chance to be chilled, relaxed  
I think there’s too much pressure from society  
when you’re 14 you’ve got to behave a certain way  
got to take on responsibility  
what we do is like a bit of freedom, can escape  
I think that kids who are on computers and TV  
don’t spend time to stop for five minutes  
look about to see what’s around  
I think if they’re not taught that  
don’t know they’re missing it  
if they’re shown it then it’s different  
can go down to the beach or to the woods  
begin to know what’s around  
start looking at different things  
too structured, too computer-oriented  
I think it’s sad, isn’t it?

### **Initial themes identified**

- Benefits of being involved in research – mutualism of practice and research (first ten lines of Linda’s I-poem).

- Danger of making assumptions about young people.
- Transformative experiences.
- Importance of play and playfulness.
- Comfort, discomfort, comfort zones.
- Youth-led experiences, self-directed, ownership – practitioner standing back.
- Social – being together, shared experiences.
- Food and drink – links to comfort? Social??
- Need for experiences to be relevant and replicable (on own, without a practitioner).
- Awareness of Power (inherent in facilitator/leader role).
- Developing a sense of place.
- Developing skills, scaffolding learning.
- Informal, gentle, caring approach.
- Emotions – emotional – passionate practitioners.
- Impact of schools, negative experiences, and limiting access to projects.
- Taking responsibility for actions, citizenship.
- Public perceptions of YPs, intolerance.
- Risk aware/averse.
- Peer pressure, being self-conscious, awareness of own identity.
- Planned outcomes vs needs-led.
- Chance to relax, de-stress, unwind.
- Barriers to accessing outdoor spaces/experiences.
- Emotional nourishment.
- Connections to nature – contentious term.
- Alternatives to outdoors – TV and IT.
- How nature is communicated – demographic.
- Need for collaboration – all in it together.
- Pressure to grow up too soon / societal and cultural.

At this stage of my research, I identified these as potential themes to explore further and using writing as a method of inquiry, some of the most resonant themes formed the basis for my stories. I shared my findings with Linda in a report, to check that I had provided an accurate record of the visit and our conversations, and to get her response to my initial interpretations. This formed part of the conversations at my next visit.

## **Visit Two**

My second research visit took place in spring 2014. The themes identified from my first visit were explored more within interviews and conversations, and I explained to participants that the approach I was using for my PhD included creatively interpreting my findings, experiences and reflections, then presenting them in the form of short stories. During this visit, I shared some of my stories with Linda, and explained that my aim is for them to be used to promote conversations about the relevant issues/topics, and potentially to form part of a training programme for people who work with young people outdoors. After my visit, I was informed that the project had failed to secure continuation funding and the project staff had been issued with notice of redundancy. I provided them with a second, summary report which they could make use of to inform and support applications for future funding.

## **Summary of meetings**

There were three meetings, arranged over different days:

- Monday: Organisation with Linda and volunteer, Rob.
- Tuesday: Focus on Work Group.<sup>57</sup> This is a community-based group who have participated in the Coastal Project.
- Wednesday: Local Academy. This is a school that has participated in the Coastal Project.

The first conversation with Linda and Rob provided me with greater insight into the project, and an outline of some of the activities recently undertaken. This enabled me to gain information that could be used to introduce topics of conversation with the young people, serving as a prompt to remind them of what they had done within the Coastal Project. The two groups, Focus on Work Group and Local

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<sup>57</sup> This is a national organisation, with projects across England, Scotland and Wales that are designed to help young people get and keep paid employment. They work with young people identified as NEET (not in employment, education or training).

Academy, were recruited by Linda, who explained to them what I was doing and provided us with each other's contact details so that we could arrange the meetings. This enabled me to share information and consent forms prior to the visit, and allowed us to begin to get to know each other by email. As before, after each session I recorded my thoughts, feelings and reflections within my research journal. I report on each meeting, presenting the findings under four key themes:

- (1) general thoughts on the project;
- (2) developing a relationship with nature;
- (3) impact on health and well-being – of young people and staff;
- (4) impact on desire to help conserve the natural environment.

This is presented in date order, starting with the first meeting with Linda and Rob, then the community group, finally the school visit. This allowed me to take an iterative approach, whereby my findings and reflections from each meeting were taken forward to the next meeting, as a way of testing and evaluating my findings.

### **Interview with Linda and Rob**

#### *General feedback on project*

The interview took place outside, in woodland on the edge of the beach where some of the sessions had taken place.<sup>58</sup> This enabled them to show me what had happened where, and helped me to develop a sense of place and awareness of their work. It was apparent that they were very committed, both to the project and to encouraging young people to spend time outside. Both showed a high level of understanding of the issues faced by young people, for example: coping with academic challenges/pressures; having a sense of failure; of young people being

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<sup>58</sup> Please see p.265 for a photographic image taken in this location.



written off at a young age and mental ill-health issues. They identified that young people do not seem to have the opportunity to play outside, feeling that this may stem from a lack of parental involvement/encouragement, reinforced by a mainly indoor curriculum at school. They spoke of simple activities like skimming stones, rolling down hills and climbing trees that young people experienced for the first time through being involved in the Coastal Project. They believed this was enabling young people to have the types of experiences you would expect a younger child to have, by creating opportunities that have been missed, and encouraging young people to want to be outside – to see it as a place that is relevant and inviting for them to be in. They argued that without this type of foundation, this sense of belonging and ease in an outdoor space, it would be difficult to involve a person in caring for, or about, the natural environment.

*Developing a relationship (connections) with nature*

We had a long conversation about the concept of dis/connection to nature and of how to measure/assess this. They felt that these are terms that are not understood by many young people, particularly the type of young people who tend to participate in the Coastal Project. Linda and Rob felt that what their project offers is more of an introduction to being outside, and explained that many of the young people who have joined sessions, have little awareness of nature, rarely go outside and have little idea of what is on their own doorstep:

“To me, you’ve got a group of kids that I would have said were disconnected from nature, not because they were ‘**disconnected**’<sup>59</sup> - they just had no relationship to it – they never saw any... we’re talking about kids like the ones that come to Linda’s project. When we started off, nature just didn’t exist. They live in ‘the area’ [anon.] and they’ve never been to [names of places], well maybe one or two have, but most haven’t. But really, they knew nothing of it, they lived here but they might as well not have lived at the coast. By the end of the time, they’d been to all these places, they understood...” (Rob)

#### *Impact on health and well-being*

Both Linda and Rob identified that the young people’s health and well-being seemed to be improved following experiences outdoors. When I questioned what it was about being outdoors that did this, Linda replied:

“It gives us room to stop and think, and just have a bit of...time off...space, quiet, it’s just being out, being out and having the space to actually stop...”

This comment resonates with research I conducted in the other locations, which also found that young people were looking for a sense of peace, expressing a need for space to just be, and chance to de-stress. This is something many of them are finding in outdoor experiences, along with a sense of achievement on completing practical, skills-based tasks and practical challenges. Many of the young people who are referred to projects like the Coastal Project have experienced difficulties in mainstream, statutory schooling. They are encouraged to participate in outdoor projects as a way of improving their confidence and raising their self-esteem. This was well articulated by Rob:

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<sup>59</sup> Original emphasis.

“Some of these kids, who’ve never had any real achievement in their lives, they’re the binned kids, the ones that everyone tells them they’re rubbish, that they can’t achieve anything, they’re not going to get exams, and you’re (sic.) probably not going to get a job, but they come out here, and they can light a fire, and they can do some of the stuff, blindfolded, they can guide other people, there’s all sorts of things, and a real sense of achievement. Isn’t that incredible?”

There was no tangible evidence of improvement to physical health, but this was not a direct aim of the project, and therefore not something measured/captured as part of their evaluation. However, some of the activities offered are physically active and it can be surmised, if conducted on a regular basis, would contribute to an improvement in physical health and well-being.

#### *Impact on desire to help conserve natural environment*

Linda and Rob spoke of the changes they had observed in young people’s behaviour and understanding, for example making a film about marine litter, litter picking and issues around use of plastic. However, it was more about raising awareness of why this is important, together with encouraging a sense of wonder and appreciation of natural spaces,

“...from the point of view of conservation, if kids are not aware of it, then when they become adults they won’t think it is important, and trying to get some of the things we’ve managed to change recently, you know about wildlife protection, done, wouldn’t happen, ‘cos people would just say it doesn’t matter, it’s not important” (Rob).

The emphasis appears to be more on encouraging young people to want to be outside in the first place. This is recognised as a good place to start, and reflects a Youth Work approach that identifies the need to start work where the young people are at, then encourage them to move forward. This is a gentle approach,

based on nurturing a positive relationship with nature, and I argue, takes a high level of skill to deliver.

### **Focus group with Focus on Work Group**

#### *General feedback on project*

This was quite a challenging focus group as the young people had already spent much of the morning indoors, and had an external visitor with them – a senior manager from the organisation's central office. The room was set up when I arrived. It was cramped, with chairs set out around a table: there was little room for movement or comfort, and the room was airless. Before entering the room, I had a conversation in the corridor with one of the workers, who was eager to share how successful the project had been from their perspective. They were keen to keep working in partnership with the Coastal Project.

The young people initially seemed reluctant to speak out: both the presence of a senior manager, and me as an unknown researcher appeared to inhibit conversation. To alleviate this, I started by directing questions to the two workers, inviting the young people to join in and to correct/add to what they were saying. This approach seemed to work, and when the manager stepped out to take a phone call, the group visibly relaxed more.

The workers and the young people spoke of how much they had enjoyed the project, and told me about the activities they had tried. The young people did not seem to recognise this as a form of learning, however with prompting from the workers they were able to see how they had developed new skills. The activities included lighting a fire safely, clearing land and cooking. They told me that none of them had tried things like this before. One session on the beach, they had found a

ball left behind by a dog, then found a stick and had an impromptu game of rounders. They had also enjoyed shelter building, and making a rope swing, recognising that although these may appear simple, childish things, they took a great deal of skill and teamwork – transferable skills:

“That’s what’s good about going on these sort of things, cos you’re learning how to do things for yourself.” (Male YP)

The male leader explained some of the changes in behaviour that he had seen, for example responding to challenges, identifying the needs of the group. He explained that they had ‘gelled together’, worked out what they needed and shown that they have leadership skills. The workers noticed this change in them, but did not think that the group had noticed for themselves – they needed someone to point this out to them. Participating in this focus group had enabled them to review and reflect on their progress and to identify individual achievements.

I asked the group to tell me about Linda. They said that she is a bubbly person:

“a crazy lady” because “she does some strange things, things you don’t expect her to – a grownup – might expect it from a five-year-old, but not from a grown-up woman.” (Male YP).

However, they also admitted that they found her enthusiasm rubbed off on them, and that they “...ended up doing things I didn’t think I would” (Male YP).

One young woman described how Linda did ‘fairy dancing’ and that although she hadn’t joined in at the time, she had just laughed and found it funny, she would do so another time: “It was something I would do with her, cos I’m quite crazy too”.

They also told me that they felt she listened to them, was understanding:

“...doesn’t push people to do things they don’t want to, although does encourage you to try new things” (Male YP).

I asked the two workers what the Coastal Project had added to their project:

Me: “When putting together a programme – what is it that this adds, that doing the same thing indoors, doesn’t?”

In response the male worker said,

“What I found is that while I’m sat (sic.) with one of these guys, lighting the fire, swinging on a rope, we can chat about cvs, and jobs, it’s more relaxed, more of a friendly chit-chat, less pressured, less of the ‘you and us’ kind of situation. I feel like more one-of-those-guys, part of the group”.

The young people agreed with that, saying it felt more like talking to a friend.

However, they also identified that their workers were always good to talk to, inside or out, because they were not like teachers, more like friends. The female worker then explained about another change she had noticed whilst outside:

“I’ve noticed that when people are in the classroom they sit in certain places, but when we’ve gone out and about, they’re hanging out with people they wouldn’t normally hang out with - and tried things for the first time, it’s given you (sic.) confidence to try other new things.”

#### *Developing a relationship (connections) with nature*

There was little evidence within this focus group, of any kind of awareness of nature, or of a connection to nature prior to participating in Coastal Project. I am not sure this improved much during their time on the project; I feel that they needed much longer outside for that to happen in a meaningful way. However, what is arguably more important is that they reflected on how little contact they had with outdoor spaces, and considered why these activities were not things they would normally do. Their spare time is predominantly spent either indoors or in the

town – only venturing on to the beach in hot weather. Participating in the Coastal Project had introduced them to new activities in outdoor spaces, something that they all admitted to having enjoyed. When I asked them if they felt that the activities offered to them were right for their age group, a response was:

“Yes, there should be more of it... going out playing sports, cutting trees, trying new things, freedom really” (Male YP).

### *Impact on health and well-being*

The sense of escapism and freedom was repeated in several comments. When questioned about if they felt different after being outside, one responded saying that he felt more relaxed after being outside, more comfortable, as the “*focus isn’t on you when you’re talking*”. We had a chat about how this focus group may have worked differently if we had been outside, and they told me they would have been more comfortable talking whilst doing something else. The male worker explained further that they enjoyed the activities like fire-lighting, because they were “*things that are a little bit naughty, a sense of freedom*”.

Other than this sense of freedom, of being able to relax, and to play in an unplanned, spontaneous way, there was little evidence of an impact on their health and well-being. However, both workers were keen to emphasise that they had seen an increase in self-confidence, and teamwork – being able to work with new people – through undertaking these activities. These are all attributes that potentially may be linked to a wider sense of well-being.

### *Impact on desire to help conserve natural environment*

This project had helped raise awareness of some of the issues around looking after natural spaces, with an emphasis on marine litter. One of their sessions had also involved cutting back scrub to help make space for wild orchids to grow. However, the young people did not seem to have grasped this concept, and appeared surprised when reminded by the workers that what they had been doing was conservation work. In contrast, they all remembered cutting back the trees, lighting the fire, cooking food and being together – they remembered the social side, and the ‘what’ but not the ‘why’. They all seemed keen to try this kind of work again, suggesting that the Coastal Project had provided a good introduction to conservation work. A foundation has been established that could be further developed.

### **Focus group and interviews with Local Academy School**

#### *General feedback on project*

Overall there was very positive feedback on the project which was identified as providing opportunities for sharing new experiences and learning more about nature. The young people from this school who had engaged with the project, had been identified as having special education needs and/or disabilities. Although still within statutory provision, they were in a nurture-type unit and on an alternative/reduced curriculum. The adults I spoke with felt that the young people had enjoyed the activities, learned a lot about their local area and reported seeing a change in their behaviour whilst participating in the project. It is unclear how long the impact would last, and the staff emphasised that they felt it was important to have regular, sustained activities outdoors. There was unanimity about the



importance of outdoor spaces for learning, and for hands-on, playful activities to engage attention and develop knowledge.

“They can be a bit..., can be quite picky with each other, which I think is normal. These ones, a bit more chilled out than in the classroom – because in the classroom you have to study, while when you’re outside you don’t realise you’re doing something, then your knowledge goes up... learn something even... They enjoyed it, they enjoyed it. She <sup>60</sup> made it interesting and fun.” (Male TA)

A second TA separately commented on this, saying,

“They bond more as a team, when we’re off site. This group, they’re a really lovely group, but they bicker a lot, it’s quite like infant school bickering, you know? Not too cruel, but when we’re out, I personally think it’s the best thing ever, you know, take these children out. They bond together as a team.” (Female TA)

The group of young people were part of a supported group, identified as having specific learning needs, and the teaching staff explained that they struggled to understand some concepts, and many had limited ability to remember events. For example, prior to my visit they had reviewed the activities undertaken as part of the Coastal Project, and looked at photos. Some of the children could not remember the litter-picking activity; however, they did remember drinking hot chocolate on the beach, and being with friends. Being reminded of this memory helped to trigger some of the other memories of the day.

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<sup>60</sup> Referring to Linda.

It became apparent from talking with the teaching staff that they too had learned from their experiences, and that sharing these with the young people had impacted on their relationship with them, which carried on into the classroom:

“I really, really bond with the groups. Because of that, I do anything that they do, so there’s photos in there, and there’s one where I’m soaking wet, because a big wave came over, they see you as more human, rather than - I’m just a teaching assistant, but any member of staff they think ‘oh teacher’ - but they do, they see... for a start, there’s the bonding thing, because you find when you’re out in all these weathers, you bond, and you know, there are times when we’re tired, and we’re worn out and we’re cold, but that keeps you going ...” (Female TA).

#### *Developing a relationship (connections) with nature*

Many of the young people were reported to have little awareness of the natural spaces around them prior to participating in the project. This was explained by teaching staff who said that many parents did not take their children outside. For example, a female TA explained:

“I have friends my age, who have never, ever been to the beach, and we’re actually just down the road, a beautiful beach, very quiet little place, beautiful beach, and they’ve never been on the beach. And these are people my age who are mums.... ‘*I don’t like sand*’. You hear that a lot...”

This member of staff went on to discuss a pupil who had since been referred to more specialised provision:

“We took him out, his little face lit up, ‘cos he was allowed to play with the trees, and climb the trees and... some of them, they do bring a lump to your throat. You know it really does... some of them, I don’t think they’ve done it that often before. You know, I don’t come from this area, I’m literally just down the road, but it’s a different county... some of the students who live here don’t realise that there’s woods just literally... and I find that quite strange...”

### *Impact on health and well-being*

All the staff I spoke with had noticed that the young people were more relaxed and less stressed when learning outdoors, demonstrated in a more tolerant attitude towards their peers, their teachers and to approaching new activities.

“... we had a student, she was in this group, unfortunately left just before Easter, very hyperactive little girl, she was calmer, she was calmer outside. The others in class, tended to leave her out a lot, when we were out, they all mixed in.” (Female TA)

They expressed the opinion that young people spend too much time on computers, and not enough time playing outside; they believed this to be detrimental to general health and well-being. Alongside this, they felt there was a need for safe places for children to play: some of the concerns raised were ‘stranger-danger’ and traffic. There was a general belief that children were encouraged to grow up too quickly, particularly in response to media images and representations.

“... they need more places to be safe, playing and being kids. I think that’s the biggest problem... I think the media, and general stuff, makes our kids too quickly too grown-up... let the kids be kids. I think that’s what some of the kids are suffering, ‘cos ... they have lost that being a kid because they’ve had to be a grown-up.” (Male TA)

The concept of self-confidence may be linked to the more generic concepts of health and well-being, and was something reported as improving following the outdoor activities. Two exemplar comments on this:

“You see their confidence grow as well. Because, I think at school, they’re aware that they struggle in lessons, they’re aware of that, but they’re finding something they can actually do. I can achieve, I can light a camp fire, I can actually cut down a tree... they are finding things they can do... I really do believe that their confidence grows, because as I say, they can do stuff. You know they can, it’s just in school... they can’t do the stuff the school wants

them to do, you know the reading, the writing, the history and French. But they can do that.” (Female TA)

“I’ve just seen so much, their confidence grow, their moods, everything, I really am for taking the kids outside...” (Female TA)

#### *Impact on desire to help conserve natural environment*

There was some evidence of a sustained interest in marine litter, and of how this could be addressed through litter picking and raising awareness around the use of plastic. However, the young people had required a significant amount of preparation work prior to my visit, to remind them of what they had done, and why. The use of photographs to capture their experiences was particularly effective, enabling them to remember their experiences and to share them with others. There is a wide range of differing abilities within the group, and I am unsure of the extent to which they had grasped some of the complexities of conservation issues. Does that matter? I’m not sure it does. They had all clearly enjoyed being involved in the activities, and had been able to undertake them in a thoughtful, safe manner and appeared to genuinely care about not harming natural spaces. The Coastal Project had clearly succeeded in introducing these concepts, and through the approach employed by Linda and her staff, had enabled them to participate in a manner that was relevant and appropriate to them.

#### **Discussion and implications for my research**

It has been illuminating to look at this project from differing perspectives: practitioners (paid and voluntary); participating organisations and young people. Whilst the intention of the project may have been to develop a stronger

relationship with nature through facilitating outdoor experiences, it is apparent that it has achieved much more than that. All involved (that I met with), viewed it as a success - as an effective way of engaging young people, not only in learning about nature, but about learning in general. There was considerable emphasis on social skills, ability to work in a team and to develop positive working relationships – with their peers and with supporting adults.

One of the most striking things about this project is that it was delivered in a very skilful, yet playful way, using this approach to introduce some of the concepts of conservation and ecology to young people. This approach was appreciated by young people, staff and volunteers:

“... through being outside, not being in a classroom, kids learn better, because they learn something without knowing it, when you play... so they learned through, in a way through play, but meaningful play.” (Male TA, Local Academy)

This went beyond activities, behaviours and actions, encompassing both modes of thinking, and communicating. Much of this is down to the skill and experience of the facilitator and volunteers, particularly the project officer, Linda who set the overall tone for the project. The volunteers, teachers and young people all talked about her in glowing terms, for her attitude and for her knowledge:

“...she’s done a really good job with us I’d say, and I think she enjoys it as well.” (Male TA, Local Academy)

“Linda always tries to pack so much into sessions, she’s always committed to giving everyone the best she possibly can... She’s got such incredible stamina, to be able to be there every week, to keep coming up with new

stuff, to have a belief in the people you are with... a stunning leader" (Male volunteer, Coastal Project).

However, spending time with Linda it is apparent that she is unaware of her own talents and abilities, she is very humble about her work and quick to underplay her role: *"It's just sharing, isn't it? ... it's about accommodating different personalities"* (Linda). This may sound simple, but it is not easy to achieve in practice, especially when working with challenging young people. The Coastal Project has established many effective partnerships with other organisations, and appears to have been effective in providing interesting and engaging outdoor learning experiences for young people – and for the people who work with them.

The people I met whilst conducting my research all spoke positively about the project, particularly about Linda, and her ability to relate to young people. The only potential drawback was the short-term nature of the funding, which is unfortunately typical of grant-funded initiatives. The project has effectively enabled young people to try new things outside, to learn more about their natural environment and to want to spend time outside. They can be seen to have developed a more positive attitude towards being outside, and to have begun to develop a relationship with natural places. Yet, it is still very early days for them; there is more work to be done to enable this to be sustained longer-term. It is frustrating that this work is threatened by the imminent end of funding. I hope that they will be successful in securing funding to enable them to continue to offer relevant and engaging opportunities for young people.

This phase of my research highlighted the importance of relating work with young people to work with families, parents, carers, and of taking a lifelong learning approach to outdoor projects. The activities offered by the Coastal Project are of an introductory nature, they complement initiatives based elsewhere, for example, in schools, youth groups and community-based projects. There needs to be awareness of wider cultural and societal initiatives, and to link in with these:

“We are such a throw-away society. And I think more needs to be done to change that, to educate the kids... if your parents don’t recycle, or they throw away food, or they don’t even separate it ... People think what’s the point, and just chuck it.” (Male TA, Local Academy)

This phase of my research generated a discussion around the pressures of parenting, of families losing the time and space to play with their children:

“...because parents work, they’ve got to look after their siblings, I think that’s unfortunate. That’s the way it is in these days, sometimes mum and dad have to work, to be able to provide for their kids, I think that’s another issue...” (Male TA, Local Academy)

These are topics that I intend to explore further within the next phases of my research, and through into my post-doctoral work, particularly regarding societal/cultural pressures. I am going to finish this section with a quote from Linda, which I feel encapsulates her approach:

“...it’s just about giving them something to hold on to, to grab on to, as a way of feeling comfortable about where they are. That’s how I see it.”

## PART TWO: RESEARCH TALES

This central part of my thesis discusses my findings which have been creatively analysed and interpreted making use of stories. It is presented in seven chapters, which include a paper (journal article or book chapter) prepared for publication, and a short introduction to contextualise it within my research study, with key words and a reference list. I also identify if the intended audience is practitioner, academic or both. Each chapter has a specific focus, identified as a key discovery (finding) from my primary research. The eighth, and final chapter in this part presents a Practitioners' toolkit, which encapsulates my findings.

I have chosen to share them in the way I feel most effectively enables me to narrate an overall story of my research, which pays heed to narrative flow and coherence. Each paper has a distinct theme, however there is considerable overlap in terms of how it was informed by my reflections, reading and primary research experiences. To aid the reader to see how they fit together and are situated within the overall research process, I state whether it was written at the start, middle or towards the end of the study. However as identified earlier (see p.13), my research has been exploratory and circular, it has not been linear. Therefore, I do not feel a more precise timeline of publications is necessary or effective: each paper can be read as a standalone document, so it does not matter in which order they are read.

**Acknowledgement:** Thank you to all the reviewers of these articles who have helped me to refine them and provided me with inspiration for future foci of study.



## Chapter 4 – Creativeness

The first chapter in Part Two is presented in the form of an academic journal article/book chapter; prior to submission, it will be formatted to meet the publishers' guidelines.<sup>61</sup> The title of this article is 'Exploring a Shared Space as a Different Place' and its focus is on telling the story of how I have developed a methodology for/through my research, by responding to, and reflecting on my observations and experiences. This provides an exemplar of my approach to creating a story from my primary research, and then utilising it to develop an understanding of what was happening that takes account of our existing values, beliefs and emotions. This understanding may be used to inform the way we work in similar situations. The empirical data which informed this paper was elicited near the start of my primary research (summarised pp.61-75).

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### **Article title: Creative Methodology: Shared Space as a Different Place**

#### **Abstract**

"She loves going outside, and the fresh air is so good for her..." I listen to the carer's words whilst focusing my eyes on the young woman in the wheelchair in front of me. In this chapter, I explore my perspective as a researcher, relating this to findings from my qualitative study into young people's relationship with nature. A short story is centrally positioned to illustrate the space and place of both a young person and me, in the role of researcher. I adopt an evocative approach, advocated by Pelias (2004, p.1) as a way of inviting 'identification and empathetic connection', and by Sparkes (2007, p.522), in that in this format, the story '...simply asks for your consideration'. Story is the natural way that we make sense of our world – and it is how we can make sense of our relationship both with other people, and with ourselves. I present a creative interdisciplinary methodology as the

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<sup>61</sup> As of January 2017, this paper has been accepted for inclusion within a proposal for a Palgrave Handbook of Auto/Biography in Narrative.

most effective way to explore this, enabling us to understand specific research contexts, cognisant of our own values, beliefs and emotions. However, as Gutkind (1997) reminds us, it is important to balance an autobiographical stance, against being seen as a self-indulgent, egotistical, navel-gazer.

This is provocative research that invites ongoing introspection, reflexivity and dialogue. By responding to calls for work that is challenging, creative and exciting (Kraftl, Horton and Tucker, 2014), it provides an intimate understanding of young people's relationship with nature, whilst also contributing to understanding the position of auto/biography within narrative research.

**Keywords:** creative methodology; interdisciplinary; auto/ethnography; hermeneutic; action research; outdoor learning.

## **Introduction**

This article is a response to an acknowledged '...critical need to advance methods and methodological discussions in the human/social sciences beyond being "about disability," (Lester and Nusbaum, 2015, non-paginated), and answers a call to refuse '...the repositivation of qualitative research' (McCoy, 2012, p.762). The discussion draws on literature from a range of disciplines from sciences (natural and social), arts and humanities, adopting an integrated approach to include experiential, outdoor and adventure education; environment and nature; eco-criticism; youth work; child/adolescent development and play; storytelling and creative writing; identity development; philosophy and psychology. It is also of relevance to the sub-discipline of children's geographies, which is recognised as a place that utilises creative methodologies, resulting in '...diverse, challenging, exciting, creative, and interdisciplinary work' (Kraftl, Horton and Tucker, 2014, non-paginated). It represents an eclectic and amorphous body of literature which aims to encourage readers to engage in the wider, interdisciplinary dialogue regarding innovative

research methodologies to explore dimensions of youth in a manner that challenges taken for granted social norms and deficit-based perspectives.

The aim of this article is to share my critical reflection on the methodologies appropriate to conduct my research into efforts to 'reconnect-with-nature' young people who have been identified as 'disconnected' from it. As with the genre of ethnographic approaches, the writing allows the juxtaposition of academic writing and a free-writing (first person) style (Mitra, 2010). I do this by placing a young woman's perspective, creatively interpreted in a fable, with the explicit purpose to respectfully centrally position her within the article, in full acknowledgement of her inability to do this for herself. Fables may be defined as a short story that shares a moral position (Oxford Essential English Dictionary (OEED), 2011). The discussion here adopts the everyday usage of the word 'moral' to signify behaviour most people would consider to be wise, right, good or virtuous (OEED, 2011). I am aware that as so eloquently explored by Witherell and Edwards (1991, p.293) 'Theories of morality have always engendered both controversy and mystique' and I am conscious some readers may prefer the apparently less judgemental terms 'values' and 'principles'. However, the fable can be seen to convey a lesson derived from an experience, with the explicit aim to guide behaviour and encourage critical thought: the application of the word moral is therefore appropriate.

I strive to write in a way that is deliberately evocative, provocative and multi-faceted, that is a form of '...scholarship [that] reaches toward an audience, it cares. It wants to make a difference...' (Pelias, 2004, p.12). What is presented here is a

joining of voices in a multi-layered textual form (Ellis, 2004) whereby I first invite the reader to imagine themselves in another's place, embodied within the retelling (after Mazzei and Jackson, 2012) of a specific moment, and then provoke the reader to join in a reflective contemplation of what this may mean in practice.

"She loves going outside, and the fresh air is so good for her..."

I listen to the words of the carer whilst focusing my eyes on the young woman in the wheelchair in front of me. The young woman's eyes are firmly fixed on the top of the head of the older woman who is leaning over her. She is unable to speak, at least in audible words. No-one is sure how much she can hear, or understand of the world around her...

I observe her hands, which the carer is attempting to cover with woolly gloves. Her fingers stiffen, resolutely unbending. An unspoken battle commences. I remember similar battles with my own (non-disabled) children when they were young, and think that mittens would have been so much easier...

A brief concession on the part of the carer who switches to pulling a warm, woolly hat over the young woman's head, cheerfully pronouncing: "There, that will keep your ears warm." Then the finger battle resumes ...

They are interrupted by the arrival of what I take to be a school nurse, who quietly interjects that the young woman has missed her lunch. A syringe of liquid nourishment appears, to be injected through a tube into the young woman's stomach. The carer explains they will have to stay behind while we take the rest of the class to the park. She promises they will join us as soon as they can ...

Two hours later, we return to the classroom. The young woman is sat at the front of the class, accompanied by the carer, who cheerfully announces, "Look, she's having her own nature experience..."

She is positioned in front of a whiteboard connected to a computer, which is showing whirling, swirling, multi-coloured pictures, accompanied by 'sounds of nature'. My first reaction is frustrated anger. This is not a nature experience. This is someone else's interpretation, a synthesised, clinical version in an indoor space. The young woman has been deprived of something vital...

I place myself next to them as the other students go to the cloakroom to remove their outdoor clothing. I rest my hand next to hers, our fingers gently touching. Then I look down. Her fingers are relaxed. Her eyes are

focussed on the patterns in front of her. I follow her gaze to the screen and find its effects hypnotic...

On waking from my trance, I reflexively question 'How can I include this experience in a research project that purposefully focuses on young people's voices?' <sup>62</sup>

The ellipses at the end of eight sentences within this story suggest points at which to pause and focus the conversation: metaphorically they are '...intervals and voids [which] prompt readers as well as the author to think differently' (Koro-Ljungberg, 2012, p.808). This process is facilitated through asking specific questions – a process which culminates in addressing the story's final question. As highlighted by Milligan and Wood (2009, p.2), there is a recognised need for '...conceptual approaches to closely align with the nature of changing bodies of knowledge in a fluid social world ... conceptual understandings are better understood as transition points rather than endpoints'. In response to this, and in the hermeneutic tradition of 'questionableness' (Nixon, 2014), the article will end, not with conclusions, but with more questions to encourage further contemplation. I offer my perspectives within an interpretation that takes account of both 'context and circumstance' (Mazzei and Jackson, op. cit., p.745) and then encourage you to consider your own.

### **She loves going outside, and the fresh air is so good for her...**

Simple words, apparently casually spoken, however they reveal so much about the carer's approach to life, and to caring for her charge. There is an air of assumed positivity, an easy assertion of authority that perhaps aims to convey a commitment

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<sup>62</sup> Adopting a theory of reflexivity as actualising a practical intelligibility shaped by the dispositions of the habitus (Farrugia, 2013)

to inclusive practice: a belief we should have equality of opportunity to participate in the activities on offer (Thompson, 2011). And yet I feel the first niggles of discomfort, we are forcing this young woman to experience the world on our terms, not her own. This normalising language is from the perspective of the provider; the shared space cannot be contested but ownership of the decision to be there can through giving more status to knowledge constructed in everyday life (Fenwick, 2003). Within this apparently simple story of an everyday experience there are '...multiple perspectives and conflicting values ... conflict, controversy, and complexity embedded within...' (Wood, 2007, p.42).

The dominant discourses regarding learning outdoors espoused by international (for example Children and Nature Network) and UK-based organisations (including leading conservation charities: RSPB; National Trust; The Wildlife Trusts) are that children and young people are disconnected from nature, are experiencing nature-deficit disorder (Louv, 2005) and arguably more importantly, that we need to reconnect them. However, has this negative discourse become too dominant (domineering)? How can we know what is important to each individual?

**No-one is sure how much she can hear, or understand...**

So many questions arise from this simple statement, including how does she make meaning of her world? How do we then make meaning of this? How do we capture 'silent/silenced' voices? What do we mean by 'voice'? Is this different from speech? Can you have a voice without speech? Yes, according to Mazzei and Jackson (op. cit.), if we see it as *noiseless* rather than silent. There is not sufficient room to address all the questions here, especially those with a biological/neurological aetiology, so I am making a choice to focus on meaning-making and voice, and on

the question of how do I, as the researcher bearing witness to the encounter in an attempt to produce knowledge which can be shared with others, avoid treating her 'voice' in a simplistic and mechanistic manner (Mazzei and Jackson, Ibid.).

Voice is not only what we chose to say, it is also our inner, internalised voice: the words we think and feel but do not say aloud. We must develop a relationship that enables us to listen and then to understand. As emphasized by Gilligan (1993, p.xvi) this is a relational exchange: 'Voice is natural and also cultural ... a powerful psychological instrument and channel, connecting inner and outer worlds'. This forms part of the process whereby we make sense of our world, and our experiences within it. Cope and Kalantzis (2000) identify six elements of the process of meaning making, only one of which is linguistic; the others are visual, audio, gestural and spatial modes of meaning. In their later work, Cope and Kalantzis (2009) propose the use of open-ended questions about meaning, enabling us to interpret situations and transfer multi-literal meaning to different and possibly unfamiliar settings.

There are multiple ways to 'read' the encounter described in the story (Kuntz and Presnall, 2012); the focus on capturing and presenting the 'finger battle' within a story, makes this the primary artefact of the encounter. Furthermore, it avoids '...reification of the transcript as the primary artifact [*sic.*] of the interview' (Kuntz and Presnall, 2012, p.733), highlighting the embodied and emplaced nature of the interaction. If this was recorded as an interview/focus group, without an oral-voice she would be absent, although perhaps there may be some displaced noises that may be attributed to her, her presence may be discounted from a representational transcript. Shifting perspective so that we move from the invisible/inaudible to the

visible/audible, through embodying the central role in the story, she becomes visible, her presence is heard and felt.

We may identify purposeful behaviour on the part of the carer, who demonstrates her concern and care through putting gloves on to keep the young woman's hands warm; this suggests a shared belief it is good for her to go outside, a sign of common purpose with us/the project. By interpreting the resultant tensing of the fingers as a deliberate action, rather than an uncontrollable muscle spasm, we are attributing purpose to this act. It could also be seen as making a political statement through body language rather than words: a silent rebellion.

### **Mittens would have been so much easier...**

I realise if mittens *had* been used, this moment would have been masked, it would have gone unnoticed. How much else are we missing through traditional methods? In the name of efficiency and effectiveness, is there time and space for non-verbal communication? Do we have the necessary skills and awareness to adopt this approach with young people, particularly those who have some form of disability? When considering young people, it is important to take a holistic view: to understand what happens during this transitional phase of a person's life account must be taken of their earlier experiences, their social, cultural and political contexts. As explained by Valentine (2003), adolescence is not a phase to be grown out of, it is a part of a lifelong process that shapes and defines a person. Whilst mittens may be appropriate for a young child, and hand-warmers of choice for some young adults, young people of a similar age to this young woman are more likely to opt for gloves, arguably seen as more age-appropriate. Gloves allow for more individual movement of fingers, more freedom for expression.



### **Then the finger battle resumes ...**

In the end neither combatant emerges as a victor: the battle is ended by the appearance of a third, apparently neutral person. There are no answers, merely more questions, particularly with regards to what, if anything, the young woman was trying to convey. Was she hungry? Cold? Unhappy at the thought of going outside?

As a visiting researcher, the limitations of being a participant-observer in this space are all too clear to me; I do not have a well-established relationship with either the young woman or her carer; I am accompanying the project worker who is facilitating the outdoor experience. I recall a session, two weeks earlier: restricted by time, the morning's activity had occurred within the space of the school grounds. The sun was shining, most of the young people were happy and playful, running around and calling out to each other. The young woman in the story had joined in, in her own way. She had been wheeled outside by her carer and placed near the centre of the playground. I remember observing her turn her face towards the sun, like a flower, absorbing the warm rays through her skin. She had appeared calm and relaxed: so very different from today.

### **She promises they will join us as soon as they can ...**

She says they will join us in our space, in the neighbouring park. But they do not join us. If they had, would it have been accessible to them? Or relevant? We have become adept at considering those who have become excluded, and, in the name of inclusion, developing methods of reaching them, to include them in what we offer. However, we also need to listen to them, in a multi-modal manner. It is not enough to provide resources and materials to enable them to participate in what

we offer, what we like doing; we need to explore other ways of being outdoors (Hayes, 2014). And perhaps that does involve using technological means to provide a relevant nature experience indoors, for those who have the most profound disabilities.

### **Look, she's having her own nature experience...**

What do we mean by 'nature'? This is a highly-contested concept, with many different definitions. This article uses the everyday definition as the physical world and everything in it (such as plants, animals, mountains, oceans, stars, etc.) that is not made by people, as well as the natural forces which control what happens in the world. This does not ignore that much of what is thought of as a 'natural environment' is manufactured, moulded and manipulated by humans: it does however provide some parameters for the discussion being held here (Hayes, 2015a).

Places we identify as natural include woodland, field, hillside or beach: the defining feature is the way it is perceived by the people using it. In this situation, the park next door to the school is seen as more of a natural space than either the school or the school grounds. The restorative powers and health benefits of nature are widely reported (for example: Ulrich 1984; Hartig et al. 1991; Kaplan, 1995). The dominant discourses highlight that the lives of many westernised children and young people, particularly in the UK and USA, do not allow much space for nature (Louv, 2005; Ridgers et al., 2012): contemporary lives tend to be more urban, indoors-based. However, Ridgers et al. (Ibid.) emphasize that whilst parents may be concerned their children have fewer opportunities to play, they also have increased concerns regarding risk: '...the changing nature of play is closely linked to societal changes in

safety attitudes' (Ridgers et al., 2012, p.49). But this is not new: this is something that was highlighted by Valentine and McKendrick in 1997, who found from their research that '... the most significant influence on children's access to independent play is not the level of public provision of play facilities but parental anxieties about children's safety and the changing nature of childhood' (Ibid., p.219).

Parents have an important role to play in children's access to, and use of outdoor spaces; this is further increased when we consider young people identified as having some form of disability.

The dominant discourses further emphasise direct experience of nature is integral to healthy growth and development, referred to as the 'naturalistic necessity' (Kellert, 2012) and as 'Vitamin N' (Louv, 2013). Experience of nature is categorised as taking several forms including: direct experience, for example unstructured play and contact with wild places, self-sustaining nature; indirect experiences, such as structured/facilitated contact with 'managed' nature that 'requires ongoing human input for its survival, like a garden, a potted plant, or a pet' (Kellert, 2012, p.133), and representational experiences of nature, for example through story, toys, computer or images. In the story shared here we see an example of a representational experience of nature; is this a lesser experience for this young woman? It is certainly a less risky, safer one.

### **The young woman has been deprived of something vital...**

Vital to whom? Her or us? Left to the unmitigated vagaries of nature, this young woman would not be alive; in many ways, she lives in an artificially constructed world. Yet even the action of typing these words to describe her existence feels

unkind, as if I am denying the value of her existence in the world; I feel I am slipping into the 'slippery stuff' of conflicting values and controversy; the things that are '... hard to quantify, measure, produce outcomes for and ultimately rely more on beliefs and opinions than facts' (Wood, 2007, pp.44-5). However, the questions continue: what are the benefits to her of spending time outside? How does it impact on her well-being? What about people whose lives are 'not natural'? Who is defining the 'criteria'? Placing myself next to her I purposefully enter her space, which has been defined on her terms not mine, and I do so with great care. Within this shared space, I consider is it important for her to spend actual (not only virtual) time in nature? In an effort to find out, I attempt to enter her place.

**I follow her gaze to the screen and find its effects hypnotic...**

What is the impact of 'modern' technology, media, mediated experiences of nature? There appears to be a paucity of relevant literature, with more being published about children and technology, including play (Skår and Krogh, 2009), particularly education/pedagogy (Palmárová and Lovászová, 2012; Heinonen, 2015) and the use of mobile devices. Within a wider discussion on how a possible over-reliance on virtual, electronic connections may be eroding our connection to actual physical places, Kupfer (2007, p.39) claims 'the more electronically mediated activity replaces place, the more we become dis-placed'. The nature experience is displaced through its portability to anywhere, including indoors; we are displaced through directed attention to the prescribed experience, presented to us in hypnotic, technological form. This encourages passive interpretation: there is little choice as to what to look for, and where, and why, and is at the expense of using our own imaginations to create and bring meaning either to the activity or to the

place: ‘... environments become irrelevant to what we are doing, they (...) lose meaning for us and we will cease to inhabit them in any meaningful way. Anywhere is nowhere...’ (Kupfer, Ibid., p.39).

Despite my efforts, I cannot perceive the world in the way she does, and can find no answers from looking at the screen, merely more questions, particularly as to what this troubling encounter may mean in terms of my research.

### **How can I include this experience?**

One of my main challenges has involved finding a place for this narrative amongst the other narratives on (dis)connection to nature, within my research. Disability is not listed as a keyword for this article: this is deliberate. In terms of my research, I have freedom to adapt and revise my methodology to enable me to effectively address my research question. The guidance from my more experienced supervisors helps me to avoid staying too far from research aims, reminding me this is only one young person amongst many I have spent time with. My direct, formalised relationship is with the project, not with the school, the staff, young people or their parents - yet I am committed to anti-oppressive practice, and wish to stay true to my values as a youth and community development worker. I feel the need to stay aware, sensitive to needs and situation, yet also realistic and pragmatic as my research is not about SEN/D (special education needs and/or disabilities), this is only one facet.

This encounter happened within the early phases of my research, providing a methodological framework for data collection based on SEN/D, then applying this to non-SEN/D: an alternative approach to inclusion. Reflecting on the projects which

have been included in my research, there are clear links with young people who have experienced other forms of exclusion. I have had some interesting conversations with young people about being outside: orally those who could speak, all said they enjoyed being outside. Their faces and behaviour confirmed this: they appeared to come alive when they stepped outside, chatting, giggling and skipping. And yet practical work was constrained by having to work to the lowest physical ability, at the expense of more physically able young people. Within one group, there is such a wide range of abilities that even with individualised support, it is difficult to challenge and stretch the more able. Also, medical needs tend to dominate - it is sometimes difficult to see past these to the individual within. I can understand how it is easier to provide activities within a school, safe and controlled, carefully managed according to needs. It is ethically challenging to explain my thoughts and emotions, without feeling I am being judgemental. I need to find a way to research and analyse how experiences such as this can enable young people to develop a positive relationship with nature, and then make use of this learning to inform policy and practice.

### **How can I create a methodology to fit?**

Like many other researchers exploring the slippery stuff of the social world (for example, Macartney, 2007; Mazzei and Jackson, op.cit.) I feel constrained within traditional forms of both qualitative and quantitative research, and like Richardson (2000) and Caulley (2008) I am an advocate of writing in an engaging and lively manner so it becomes a part of the research process. And there is a well-established history of using story and storytelling within human geography (see for example, Cameron, 2012 for a comprehensive critique of the way this has developed). Keen

to embrace alternative methods suggested by them, such as creative nonfiction, I was determined to find a way of working in a truly interdisciplinary manner to explore my question, so my method matched my message (McCoy, 2012).

I found the most effective way to address my research question was to combine three methodologies: hermeneutics (questioning); (auto)ethnography and action research. I assign this combination the acronym HEAR; I like that, as it implies listening. Taking each methodology in turn, firstly what do I mean when I chose to apply the term hermeneutics to my research? This is best elucidated by Fairfield (2011, p.3): 'The logic of hermeneutics is non-linear, non-formal and non-foundational; it is relational, contextual and dialogical. Interpretation does not begin at the beginning and it is without end...' I see my work as continuing a conversation which started long before I was born, and will continue long after I am gone. Through the creation of articles such as this, I pass forward my questioning, encapsulated in textual-form (including stories), as a gift to others, to provoke and stimulate their own questioning.

The second methodology, and arguably the strongest within the blend, is autoethnography, a concept that has been in use for several decades yet still has multiple meanings and interpretations. I agree with Reed-Danahay (1997, p.4) it involves 'a rewriting of the self and the social.' As a method, it reflects it is both product and process and is '... an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)' (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011, p.1). A selection of past events is remembered and analysed; the moments chosen as a

focus tend to be perceived as epiphanies, a turning-point (Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Denzin, 2014), an encounter (McCoy, 2012) or an address (Moules, et al. 2014.). I call them my magic moments: those defining moments that make us stop and wonder – to question and extract meaning (Denzin, 2014).

The experience must be critically analysed, otherwise it becomes merely ‘a nice story’ instead of an opportunity to ‘...illustrate facets of cultural experience...make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders’ (Ellis et al., 2011, p.3). This means my interpretation and presentation have been filtered through my own experiences, as a parent, educator and researcher. I agree with Macartney (2007, p.29) re/presenting ‘...perspectives and experiences through narrative is a powerful tool for illuminating and problematising practices and approaches based on deficit discourses...’ such as those applied to young people with disabilities, and/or nature deficit disorder.

The third methodology to be added to my blended approach is action research; this has enabled me to make use of ‘...ethnography to guide the research process and [...] action research to link the research back to the project’s plans and activities’ (Tacchi, Slater and Hearn, 2003, p.1). There are two key aims for my research: to improve learning to advance workplace practices, and to generate knowledge and theory. The impetus for innovation is a typical feature of action research (McNiff and Whitehead, 2011; Gomm, 2009) and is central to the research. Another distinctive characteristic is the researcher is typically a practitioner within a workplace setting: as highlighted by Somekh and Lewin (2011, p.94) ‘...it is research from inside that setting’. This contrasts with other research strategies which insist on the researcher being objective and external to the practice/setting. The



fables/stories through which I convey my findings are a form of praxiography (after Mol, in McCoy, 2012), in that they are stories about practice, based on empirical encounters.

Thinking about the context of this encounter, within the class there was a wide range of individual needs: all the children and young people have been assessed as having severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). In addition to severe or profound physical disabilities like this young woman, there was a range of other learning needs such as: autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), a diagnosis encompassing a wide range of developmental disorders that influence the social and cognitive abilities (Farrugia, 2009); attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD); visual and/or auditory impairment plus a wide range of less specified medical, health, behavioural and/or social difficulties. Meeting this level of often conflicting needs is a challenge for the teaching staff. I have relatively limited knowledge and experience of working with SEN/D outside of mainstream schools; even less of working with PMLD.

I felt challenged by this situation, unsure of myself, and of the 'best' way to deal with this in terms of my research; by *best* I am referring to the approach which is right for me, her and this situation, a reflexive subjectivity, as opposed to the more traditional usage of the word to indicate the 'right' way to be (Farrugia, 2013). Each young person has a personalised learning plan within the school, however we, as external practitioners, do not; we are viewed as the 'experts on outdoor learning', to be supported by the more specialist teaching staff.

### **Why did this particular story warrant so much attention?**

It was the jarring of my values, the questioning and challenging of my beliefs, which proved to be a transformational/pivotal moment. For many of these young people their attendance at a non-mainstream school already places them in the socially constructed position of being 'ontologically other' (Farrugia, 2009, p.1013), inhabiting a space defined by processes that in many ways serve to stigmatize the young people, and their families; their voices are mediated and interpreted by the teaching staff. How do I know it is their 'voice', how can I even begin to gain an understanding of their perspective, is it possible for me to view the world through their lenses? Does any of this matter? For me it does, and it highlights the importance of working in a moral and ethical manner which goes beyond the requirements of a university ethical panel, and necessitates highly developed self-awareness, empathic skills and a creative imagination.

The increase in disabilities has been attributed to a decrease in mortality rates for pre-term infants; babies born prematurely are vulnerable to many complications, with lifelong consequences for their growth, development and long-term health (for example Wilson-Costello et al., 2005; Behrman and Butler, 2007). My first child was born prematurely, and although initially experienced some relatively minor health complications, he has been able to live a 'normal' life. I feel many conflicting emotions when working within the SEN/D school, including relief my child (and by association me as his mother) has not been so severely affected as others; guilt at recognising this relief; respect for those who deal with these situations through choice (teachers, carers, those who choose this as a focus for their career) and

empathy for the parents I encounter. At times, there is an overwhelming feeling this could have been him, me, us... and the disturbing questions then surface as to how we would have dealt with it as a family, how I would react as a mother.

What does this mean in practice, as a researcher? I recognise research can be, indeed should be emotional (of the heart), as well as cognitive (the head) and practical (hand) and I have no wish to hide behind a curtain of academic objectivity. I include myself, not as a form of narcissism or self-therapy but as advocated by Pelias (2004, p.1) '... on behalf of others, a body that invites identification and empathic connection, a body that takes as its charge to be fully human'. I further agree with his methodological approach, there is so much more to research with people than assumed authority, critical argument and establishing the correct criteria. I want to capture the silent, minority voices, to be compassionate, passionate and emotional.

However, I also want my research to be credible, to be recognised as contributing to knowledge, to do justice to the people who volunteer to participate in my project, and to respect those who supervise me. This is not an easy combination.

After each practical session, I reflect with the project worker on the events of the day. We do this in her car, taking it in turns; we have evolved a relaxed way of working together, which allows us to be responsive to the needs of the young people, whilst also respecting our individual roles and responsibilities. Over the months I have been accompanying her, we have established an interactive, dialogical approach: we share our stories, identify the learning and explore ways to put this into action in the following week's activities. As we discuss the day's events,

I become increasingly aware I am the only one to witness the finger battle, the only one able to bear testimony, the privileged position I am in as an interpreter of social interactions.

As identified by Landsman (2003) and discussed by Farrugia (2009, p.1013), parents of children with disabilities 'come to locate, interpret, and often to advocate for the personhood of one they would previously have known only as 'the other'.' The same may be said of researchers, who must find an appropriate methodology to withstand the demands (perhaps vagaries?) of academia. The finger battle becomes a '...methodologically, embodied metaphor [that] works against the logic of abstraction, the oversimplification of processes of human meaning-making [...] a means of presenting a depth to human experience' (Kuntz and Presnall, 2012, p.738).

The need to remind myself I am there in a researcher capacity serves to remind me how much I miss being a practitioner: there is a jarring of my own emotional needs. I am also conscious of the spatial and temporal constraints on our time together and am aware I feel a bit mean, the young people have only begun to know me, to let me into their world, and soon I shall disappear again. I am aware this is 'about me', being careful of my emotional needs and I need to manage myself: so many challenges within the ethical and moral dimensions of research.

To collect my data, I had consciously avoided making notes or using a voice recorder, instead taking advantage of naturalistic, informal/impromptu interviews, conversations and reflective observations to capture my learning. However, I am

concerned I may have missed/forgotten some of the detail. One way I addressed this was to write detailed observations and reflections in the form of a project report which I shared with the project practitioner, as a form of participant checking and like sharing a post-interview transcript. I subsequently interviewed the practitioner on her response to this.

I had been clear about the purpose of this phase of my research: to conduct an evaluation into the use of participant observation as a method of eliciting data, within a hermeneutic ethnographic action research study which uses a range of methods to explore young people's relationship with nature. I feel this is an effective method, if it is approached in a participatory way, in full awareness of potential issues, especially regarding power differentials. Going forward I remain conscious of the need to carefully consider the ethics of working with young people who may not fully understand the nature of my involvement (Morrow, n.d.), to be clear about my role as a researcher.

Autoethnography holds inherent risks for the researcher: it is a transformative, emotional methodology which involves remembering, reflecting and learning from our own experiences. The process of autoethnography centres on the concepts of time and space, as we explore how the present is informed, and shaped by our past; as Custer (2014, p.2) explains, 'It becomes a dance without boundaries' whereby we (re)enter, (re)interpret and (re)create our memories and experiences in a way that enables us to retell and share them with others. It is a process which requires the researcher to allow their self to be vulnerable; Ellis (2004) warns us the constant

self-questioning is challenging and difficult, however it is also an illuminating process.

As also identified by Custer (op. cit., p.5) empathy may be fostered through autoethnographic writing: through storied form I aim to connect readers with my own experiences, in a way '...that transforms preconceived ideas and biases'. He also highlights this form of writing embodies creativity and innovation which requires imagination from both writer and reader. The inner dialogue I have is transformed into an outer dialogue and captured in both written and oral form. There is a constant battle between the need to share enough, with the need to protect oneself, and to avoid over-exposure. This awareness informs and shapes the way I research with participants: I know how it feels to be part of the process, and how important it is to take care.

Narrative stories provide us with a way of understanding experience: 'When we use our own stories, or those of others, for research, we give testimony to what we have witnessed, and that testimony creates a voice' (Etherington, 2004, p.9). Retrospection and introspection are integral to the process, but this must be methodological, to have a research purpose: for me that is to be able to explore (and to challenge) normativity, hegemony, power and oppression, and most of all to gain a greater understanding of young people's relationship with nature.

### **To bring this to a close...**

What is this young woman's relationship with nature? Her extreme sensitivity to the natural world ensures her access to it must be mediated by someone else to make it appropriate and relevant for her; which is very different to my own relationship. This experience, her story, impacts on my relationship with nature and makes me question the different ways we can access the natural world; there is no universal 'best way', only temporally, spatially and socially constructed ways. As identified by Bochner and discussed by Ellis (2004, p.252) '...we go to great lengths to hide the messiness of our research because we fear our project might be seen as unscientific or unscholarly'. Ultimately it is a matter of subjective differences (Ibid., p.253) based on personal values and morals. Understanding may be gained by participation in social situations, through dialogue between researcher and researched, referred to as 'the *hermeneutic* dimension of social science' (Burawoy et al., 1991, p.3); however, there are many ethical and moral questions/dilemmas raised through entering the lives of others, participating alongside them, sharing stories and thoughts. We should be open to this, and honest about reporting it.

There is no 'conclusion' in the traditionally expected sense; instead I invite the reader to see my research as a formative, 'ongoing conversation' (Nixon, 2014, p.3), that is open-ended and 'unpredictable'. I am looking to generate discussion topics, to continue and extend the conversation and potentially reconstruct existing theory. This is '...a dialogue that is emergent rather than conclusive, critical rather than cosmetic, involving reconstruction rather than deconstruction' (Burawoy et al. op. cit., p.7). It should also be recognised this is innovative research which aims to change the way we look at young people's relationship with nature.

The world is not a cut-and-dried finished article, it is messy, complicated and tough (see Koro-Ljungberg, 2012; Law, 2004). I am not afraid of this messiness and will not compromise my stance, to do so would be a disservice to the young woman in my story. With this firmly in mind, I end (after Pelias, 2004, p.11) with this statement:

This article serves to mark a different space, with thoughts that collect in your body, making your heart ache, and troubling your brain so that the young woman's story, as formed in words and shared by us, demands your consideration. We can see her. We can hear her. She is no longer silenced, she is present, she is placed.



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## Chapter 5 – How do I make Sense of Nature?

This chapter is presented in the form of a reflective essay which critically analyses my identity and how this impacts on the way that I make sense of nature. This reflective essay complements and extends one of my earlier papers (listed in Appendix iv, p.322), based on my MA research and it was written and presented at the start of my study: the 'Accidental Youth Worker'.<sup>63</sup> The awareness and understanding gained from writing and sharing these, helped me to define my methodology and to develop confidence in my ability to present my research creatively. This essay won the Royal Geographical Society's Higher Education Research Group (RGS HERG) Postgraduate Reflective Essay Competition 2015 and was published online on their website.<sup>64</sup>

It has been accepted as a chapter within a forthcoming book on 'Research Impact and the Early Career Researcher'.

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<sup>63</sup> This is available via URL: [http://www.eoe-network.eu/fileadmin/PDFs/EOE\\_12th\\_European\\_Conference\\_Papers.pdf](http://www.eoe-network.eu/fileadmin/PDFs/EOE_12th_European_Conference_Papers.pdf) Last Viewed 7/12/2016

<sup>64</sup> This is available via URL: <http://www.herg.rgs.org/prize/postgrad-reflective-essay-prize/postgraduate-prize-winner-2015/> Last Viewed 31/12/2016

## **Article title: Developing an academic identity: What's the time Mrs Wolf?**

### **Abstract**

The wolf embodies the Anthropocene, the current geological epoch, "...in which human society is acknowledged as having become the greatest force shaping planet earth" (RGS, 2015). Understanding this new epoch demands a 'more-than-human' mode of theorising. Utilising metaphors and symbolism, and applying the hermeneutic tradition of 'questionableness' (Nixon, 2014), my reflective essay offers a creative interpretation of my life experiences, inviting readers to join in a playful exploration of what it means to become an 'academic'. I draw on an amorphous body of literature, from diverse sources such as children's author Enid Blyton; Jungian psychologist, Pinkola Estes; and Children's Geographies, long recognised as a place that utilises creative methodologies, resulting in interdisciplinary work that is challenging creative and exciting (Kraftl, Horton and Tucker, 2014). I pay homage to, and further develop that tradition, whilst embracing concepts of playfulness (Bateson and Martin, 2013) and transformational learning (Eyler and Giles, 1999). I have gained a growing awareness of my own identity, of how it has been shaped and influenced by others over the years. This has been accompanied by a flourishing of confidence in my academic abilities. I have learned how to howl.

**Keywords:** Anthropocene; Metaphors and Symbolism; Reflection; Academic Identity; Playfulness; Transformational Learning; Blyton; Pinkola Estes; Children's Geographies; Wolves.

### **Setting the scene**

Wolves are some of the world's most charismatic and controversial animals, capturing the imaginations of their friends and foes alike. Highly intelligent and adaptable, they hunt and play together in close-knit packs ... Once teetering on the brink of extinction ... wolves have made a tremendous comeback in recent years, thanks to legal protection, changing human attitudes, and efforts to reintroduce them to suitable habitats...

(Mech and Boitani, 2010)

In many ways, the wolf embodies the impact of the Anthropocene, the current geological epoch, '...in which human society is acknowledged as having become the

greatest force shaping planet earth' (RGS, 2015). Understanding this new epoch demands a 'more-than-human' mode of theorising, for example by utilising metaphors and symbolism and applying the hermeneutic tradition of 'questionableness' (Nixon, 2014). This essay offers a creative interpretation of my life experiences and invites the reader to join in a playful exploration of what it means to become an 'academic'.<sup>65</sup> My essay draws on an amorphous body of literature from a wide range of disciplines including children's geographies, which itself has a diverse foundation and has long been recognised as a place that utilises creative methodologies, resulting in interdisciplinary work that is challenging creative and exciting (Kraftl, Horton and Tucker, 2014). My essay pays homage to, and further develops that tradition, whilst also embracing the concept of playfulness as a way of generating new thought patterns in a protected context (Bateson and Martin, 2013).

For me, the wolf has come to symbolise the development of my academic identity, counter-balanced by my wider identity as embodied within my relational roles of a wife, a parent and as a child (Burke and Stets, 2009). The most recurrent question within this process has been "*who am I?*" I have often found it easier to say what I am not, than to say what I am. As identified by Eyler and Giles (1999, p.133), 'Transformational learning occurs as we struggle to solve a problem...we are called to question the validity of what we think we know or to critically examine the very premises of our perception of the problem'. What happens when the problem we

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<sup>65</sup> In this essay, I am employing 'academic' as a noun to represent a teacher or scholar in a university or college of Higher Education. Definition available at <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/academic>

perceive is ourselves? In this essay, I interpret my inner dialogue by linking the emotional and cognitive processes (Mezirow, 1990; Theodosius, 2012) that have occurred as part of the transformational process whereby I have come to be the person I am: 'It is in relationship – in the interaction of the inner person with the outer world – that experience occurs and it is in and through experience that people learn' (Jarvis and Parker, 2005, p.1). My learning has been troubling and unsettling (Meyer and Land, 2003) and I share this with you as a way of encouraging you to consider how you have come to be the person you are. And then to consider in what ways this may impact on your relationships with the world around you.

To structure this essay, I am utilising a Map of Reflective Writing (Moon, 2004) as it effectively captures the ongoing, exploratory nature of my reflections. To paraphrase Owens' (2010, pp.25-26) discussions about the work of C.G. Jung, a reflective map is a conceptual tool, useful for signalling the prominent spatial and temporal landmarks, translating what I have learnt from my travels into tools of discovery that may be useful for deciphering human experience. Within the map are key stages: setting the context through description of events; feeding in of additional ideas; reflexive thinking relating reflection to actions; acknowledging learning; moving on to more reflection and review of purpose (Moon, op. cit.). In folklore and mythology, the wolf is symbolic,<sup>66</sup> taken to represent keen intelligence; deep connection with, and expression of instincts; appetite for freedom and a feeling of being threatened, lack of trust in oneself or others. I have often felt

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<sup>66</sup> For more on the symbolism of spirit animals see <http://www.spiritscienceandmetaphysics.com/the-top-5-spirit-animals-what-is-your-spirit-animal/#sthash.j28nCoEZ.dpuf>



silenced by others, unable to express myself through my 'outer voice' and as a result have developed the ability to listen and attend to my inner voice; through reflexivity I have learned how to weave these together. Writing this has been an emotional experience, resulting in learning, knowledge and understanding: perhaps most important of all, it has proved empowering.

I describe myself as an accidental youth worker (Hayes, 2013a). After graduating with BSc in Natural Sciences I wanted to educate and inspire others about the natural environment, to share my enthusiasm and sense of wonderment. I began working with young children, families and adults, then realised that young people were being inadvertently excluded by not offering opportunities that were accessible, relevant or attractive to them. Resolving to help change this, I qualified as a youth worker, before moving on to social science research for my doctorate. Pausing to reflect on my transformation from natural to social scientist raises the question: does there have to be a distinction or is this a false dichotomy based on traditional methodologies? Over the last three years I have found a home within the RGS, particularly the Geographies of Children, Young People and Families subgroup. Does this mean that I am a geographer? Or is this yet another facet of my increasingly complex identity, something that has always been implicit in my approach to learning and is now becoming explicit as I shine a reflexive light upon it? To understand this, I need to go back to my beginnings ...

### **As a young child**

I love reading, especially about nature. From a very early age I have buried my nose in a book; however, the kinds of books I read, and the knowledge embodied within

them has changed over the years. I reflect on my books as I question how did I come to be the person I am? What tales do my books have to tell about me? Where did my fascination for wolves come from, and how does Enid Blyton<sup>67</sup> fit in all of this: two apparently disconnected questions that in my world have become imperceptively intertwined. The second question is one I have been pondering since a conversation with a colleague, getting to know each other through swapping stories of experiences from childhood, growing up into adulthood, failed past relationships and happy current ones. I admitted: *"Enid Blyton made my childhood"* in an attempt to explain my approach to outdoor learning – an approach that embraces thinking like a child, emphasising the concepts of playfulness, imagination and stories (Hayes, 2013b). She responded: *"Me too!"* We laughed, acknowledging that it was not 'cool' to admit this!

For her it was the boarding school stories, midnight feasts and mysteries that appealed; for me it was the magical folk, enchanted woods and faraway trees, and the overwhelming sense that life was an adventure. I spent many happy hours playing with my twin sister in our back garden, looking for pixies, pretending to be a fairy, concocting magic potions from petals and rainwater. The world described by Blyton came alive in our garden and in our imaginations; however, it was quickly outgrown, and then forgotten as I moved on to more 'grown-up' books, with an ever-decreasing focus on nature and an increasing focus on relationships with people (especially boys) ...

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<sup>67</sup> Enid Blyton was an English children's author; her books have been among the world's best-sellers since the 1930s. More information about her is available from: <http://www.enidblytonsociety.co.uk/index.php>

## Growing up

My parents didn't believe in higher education for girls. *"A waste of time and money, you'll only get married and have children. No need for university, best get a job until you find a husband."* I married young, only 19 years of age and over the next few years produced four wonderful children. We grew up together: barely out of adolescence, I embraced the opportunity to continue playing, read children's books and have adventures outside. We made use of outdoor spaces such as gardens, woods, fields and parks to have adventures. Reacting to my own gendered upbringing, I resolved to be different as a parent and eschewed Blyton's books in favour of less 'girlie' books; along with my dolls they were donated to charity and I began investing in more grown up reading on bird watching, gardening and cookery.

My children grew older, providing space for me to begin to study: I registered with the Open University <sup>68</sup> and after six years successfully achieved BSc (Hons) in Natural Science – 1st Class! I started volunteering for a local conservation charity, helping with groups designed to encourage families to explore nature; then I was employed to organise the groups. My book collection grew wider: art, crafts, poetry, identification guides and scientific surveys all made their way on to my shelves. A postgraduate certificate in education for sustainability added yet more weighty tomes!

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<sup>68</sup> The Open University's mission is to be open to people, places, methods and ideas. More information is available at <http://www.open.ac.uk/about/main/>

I moved on to environmental youth work, and continued to study: first a certificate, then a Masters in Youth Work and Community Development - more books! And journals and study guides. The children's books were packed away: the favourites carefully boxed and stored; the others passed on to charity shops and gifted to friends with younger children. Then I started learning to teach, and following an introductory course in 'Philosophy for Children',<sup>69</sup> restarted buying children's books. I began to understand that these books have an ability to convey important messages in a concise, succinct, understandable way. On holidays to the Lake District I discovered a new love for Beatrix Potter,<sup>70</sup> and treated myself to a collection of her books, plus toys to match! However, it was not just the stories that appealed to me, it was the author herself: I drew many parallels between her life and mine, her experiences resonated with mine. Like Beatrix and her Cumbrian husband, my new husband and I shared a love of being outdoors and especially being outdoors in Cumbria. We holidayed in Scotland and I encountered wolves – real, live, howling wolves – trapped in a wildlife park. I wanted to set them free ...

### **Becoming an academic**

My youngest child left home. We moved to the Lake District, books were shed along the way as we attempted to downsize to a smaller house. However, within a short space of time even more studious books were added to my collection. Alongside

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<sup>69</sup> Philosophy for Children is a movement that aims to teach debating skills such as reasoning and argumentative skills to children. More information is available from:  
<http://www.philosophy4children.co.uk/>

<sup>70</sup> Beatrix Potter was an English author, illustrator, natural scientist and conservationist best known for her imaginative children's books, for example *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, which celebrated the British landscape and country life. More information is available from:  
<http://beatrixpottersociety.org.uk/>

these more children's books crept in: Aesop's fables,<sup>71</sup> Icelandic fairy tales and various nursery rhymes, bought with the intention of helping to bring to life my oral and written presentations (Hayes, 2014a). One day I awoke with a story in my head, soon followed by several more. My subconscious was making sense of my research findings and my experiences, weaving them together through a creative, interpretive process. I attempted to explain this to my doctoral supervisors, it was not something I had planned to do, it just seemed to happen. I openly acknowledged that I drew inspiration for my writing from Rachel Carson,<sup>72</sup> who had written a fable to demonstrate what would happen to the natural world if people continued to use pesticides. I liked her approach, it is markedly different from those who use scare tactics to attempt to change behaviour; she has been described as a 'gentle subversive' (Hamilton-Lytle, 2007). However, her work still differed from mine in that it seemed to be planned, a result of conscious effort to write, whilst my creative writing felt sub-conscious: it mostly happened when I was not expecting it. Whilst most of my stories were about people, other characters crept in: Boggarts, bunny rabbits and bears (Hayes, 2015a) - lots of bears!

I began sharing my stories at conferences, cautiously at first, expecting to be rebuked as non-academic (Hayes, 2014b). That did not happen; instead I was praised for being different, for making my work accessible and understandable;

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<sup>71</sup> Aesop's Fables is a collection of fables credited to Aesop, believed to be a slave and storyteller who lived in ancient Greece. More information (and variations of the fables) is available from: <http://www.umass.edu/aesop/>

<sup>72</sup> Rachel Carson was an American marine biologist and conservationist whose book *Silent Spring* (1962) and other writings (including *Sense of Wonder*, published posthumously) are credited with advancing the global environmental movement. More information is available from <http://www.rachelcarson.org/>

they became part of my methodology (Ibid.). But what to do with them next, what was their purpose? And perhaps more importantly (to me anyway) why was my brain working in this way? The first question was relatively easy: I developed a concept called 'Adventure Bears',<sup>73</sup> a small handmade fabric teddy bear designed to be played with outside which I gifted to recipients with a short story making the links to playing outside. One year later I had made over 80<sup>74</sup> of them and had begun selling them to raise funds for charity. I determined to address the second question, as to why my brain was working this way by using the metaphor of reflection as looking into a mirror whereby I look into myself (Uzat, 1998). I can see me surrounded by my experiences, people, places, objects; my mind is alive with images (Parker, 2013) and metaphors – which help to capture '...the essential nature of an experience' (Lawley and Tompkins, 2000, p.6): my book collection becomes a metaphor for the different phases of my life, as I have grown and developed into the person I am now. One book catches my eye: Enid Blyton's Nature Lover's Book (1944); a book purchased with the aim of helping me to develop inspiring and engaging activities for families and young children. I have not looked at it for years. I open it and begin to read: the words feel familiar; memories stir deep within me. The lilting, sing-song text speaks to me, calling to the little girl within ...

### **Back to today...**

"Enid Blyton, really? But I thought you were a youth worker? Wasn't she a sexist and a racist? She had some very bigoted views...and I hate to mention it, so very

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<sup>73</sup> Adventure Bears – For Examples: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOn2pOmQw9o>

<sup>74</sup> By end of August 2017 I have made over 200 bears.

middle-class!” A colleague’s comment at the mere mention of Enid Blyton. I have to acknowledge that Blyton has proved to be a controversial figure (Tucker and Reynolds, 1997), and that arguably she was all of those things, but she is of a certain time and place, a socio-cultural construction (Jones and McEwan, 2000). This is reflected in her stories that appear quaint and old-fashioned amongst more modern children’s literature. However, her work helped to shape and guide my childhood: rereading the stories and poems I realise that I have absorbed them into my subconscious, they have imperceptibly affected the way I think and write. I determine to find out more about her, to justify her inclusion in my research, and to consider how this impacts on my practice. I buy more books, then decide the best way to approach this is to reflexively write my story.

So where do the wolves fit in all this? They crept into my life un-noticed. I remember reading *White Fang*<sup>75</sup> as a child, but the book was lost as I grew up. My 40<sup>th</sup> birthday was marked with a gift of a toy wolf (a present from the wildlife park) along with homemade cards decorated with wolves; these were enjoyed, and then quietly packed away in my treasure box. In 2013, I was invited to join a leadership training programme, aligned to my doctoral research. This proved to be a pivotal moment in my life: surrounded by confident, outwardly more successful professionals, I crumpled into a mass of insecurity; I felt a fraud and a fake, out of my depth. Each night of the four-day course I returned home, howling at my husband “Who am I? What am I doing here? What’s my purpose?” I was deep in the

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<sup>75</sup> *White Fang* is a novel by American author Jack London first published in 1906. The story explores complex themes including morality, redemption and how animals may view humans. It is predominantly told from the viewpoint of the titular canine character and offers an alternative perspective.

pain of self-doubt, mired in a liminal space... 'a place of ill-defined purpose ... of transition ... a state of mind that is blurred such as that between the state of dreaming and being awake' (Wilson, 2012, p.32). This process of self-discovery proved to be a threshold moment, a rite of passage (Norris, 2011). One afternoon we played a game; unseen by the others, we had to choose a picture of an animal to enact in the woods. Without conscious thought, I sprang across the room first and silently pocketed the picture of a wolf. I felt myself come alive in the game: one minute I was stalking prey; the next I was leading the others in a hunt; then silently observing the group from a distance. Afterwards the others expressed their surprise and delight at my performance. The week finished with a group exploration of the impact we thought we had had on each other: this was torture for me. Wracked by self-doubt I had been unable to relax and participate fully within the group, something they openly acknowledged.<sup>76</sup> they wanted more of the Tracy they had experienced in the game. I came away with a determination to find her ...

### **Discovering my inner wolf**

I bought a book. "Healthy wolves and healthy women share certain psychic characteristics: keen sensing, playful spirit, and a heightened capacity for devotion" (Pinkola Estes, 1992, p.2). The words resonated deep within me, but as someone unfamiliar with psychology, this was not an easy read; I lingered over each chapter, using it to reflect on my life and experiences. I gained a growing awareness of my own identity, of how it has been shaped and influenced by others (real and fictional) over the years; this was accompanied by a flourishing of confidence in my

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<sup>76</sup> The facilitator of this session described me as lost in 'aporia' – this was my first encounter with the word, and after considering its meaning I felt it was a very apt term for the stage I was at with my research.



academic abilities. I have learned that identity is a socially-constructed, continually evolving state (Jones and McEwan, 2000); it has multiple dimensions and is an embodied reflection of lived experiences. Jones and McEwan (Ibid., p.412) exhort us to 'listen for how a person sees herself' if we want to understand them. I openly acknowledge my inner wolf, a metaphor that represents my instinctive, intuitive, primitive emotions I contain within. I am now able to release these to help me survive the wildness of the (academic) world: I understand my need to play (Pinkola Estes, 1992, p.365); I have found my voice and learned how, and when to howl (Appendix I).<sup>77</sup>

Parodying the quote that started this essay, wolves can symbolise a group of academics who gather in packs at conferences, in constant need of nourishment and mental stimulation to maintain their academic identity. With recent changes to academic funding, many fear the academic world as we know it, may be teetering on the brink of extinction. I have a role to play in this, as a researcher and as a lecturer I have meaning and purpose. I have learned how to hunt down opportunities, to carefully observe and contemplate the world around me before pouncing into action. I have developed a sense of trust in myself and my abilities. I relish the chance to relax by a fire and recuperate after a long day of work and most of all, I understand the need to frolic, play and socialise with others. As I conclude this essay, I imagine Enid playfully asking me the question, "What's the time Mrs Wolf?" <sup>78</sup> To which I firmly reply, "It's MY time."

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<sup>77</sup> Appendix I of this paper, not the thesis.

<sup>78</sup> What's the time Mr Wolf? This is a children's game: it is a form of tag and is played worldwide, under a range of different names including 'What time is it, Mr Wolf?', 'Grandma's Footsteps', '1 2 3

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Piano' and 'What time is it, Mr. Fox?' For the basic rules, as well as regional variations see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/What%27s\\_the\\_time,\\_Mr\\_Wolf%3F](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/What%27s_the_time,_Mr_Wolf%3F)

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## **Essay Appendix I: General Wolf Rules for Life**

From Pinkola Estes, (1992, p.461)

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|----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Eat               | 6. Cavil in moonlight  |
| 2. Rest              | 7. Tune your ears      |
| 3. Rove in between   | 8. Attend to the bones |
| 4. Render loyalty    | 9. Make love           |
| 5. Love the Children | 10. Howl often         |

## Chapter 6: Coming from Practice

This was one of the first publications during my research, and encapsulates my early thinking about how to make sense of it all. It was published in a magazine for practitioners of outdoor learning<sup>79</sup> and generated conversation about the importance of early experiences in nature, and what may be the implications (if any) for those who do not have positive early experiences. It represents my commitment to practice-based research, to understanding and changing our practice in a way that is informed first and foremost by first-hand experience, which is then explored and analysed through academic literature and theoretical concepts.

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### **Article Title: Lessons learned from a 5 ½ year old: getting to know nature**

*"But Aunty Tracy, I still need to see a real rabbit."* Words spoken to me by my five-and-a-half-year-old nephew – and yes, the half matters with numbers, as he explained to the lady selling us tickets to cruise across Lake Windermere. We had spent the morning visiting the World of Beatrix Potter where we reread the story of Peter Rabbit, enjoyed a picnic lunch then the afternoon's adventure was a boat trip around the Lake, waving to people on the other boats when we passed them. *"Why don't some people wave back Aunty Tracy?" "Perhaps they don't see us"*. He had carried his new rucksack with him (a present from me to help him enjoy walking),

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<sup>79</sup> More information is available from URL: <http://www.outdoor-learning.org/Default.aspx?tabid=137>  
Last Viewed 31/12/2016

which he had crammed full of cuddly, toy rabbits (nothing sensible, that can wait until he's six). The first a present from me when he was born, three others acquired over the next five and a half years, culminating in the tiny, pocket sized one bought that morning to accompany us on our adventure, and as a memento of our day. He had read some of Beatrix Potter's books and listened to the audio versions on the long drive north to visit me. We had planned to go on to Hilltop, to see where the real Beatrix Potter had lived, with the hope of seeing real rabbits in the kitchen garden, but unfortunately it doesn't open on Fridays. He took this disappointment quietly, and we agreed he'd have to come and visit again.

At this point you may be thinking this is a pleasant story, but what's the point of it for readers of *Horizons*? What's this got to do with CPD? I hope to encourage you to think about your own early experiences in nature, remember who was with you (human, toy, real and imaginary) and to consider how this may have affected the way you work now. I share my story as a way of engaging you in the wider debate of how we can support others to connect with nature: to develop an awareness and appreciation of the world around them; to feel a sense of belonging in outdoor places.

Since my nephew's return home, I've been thinking a lot about the magical days we spent together. I recognise how much I learned from him during that time, and this has caused me to reflect on my practice as an environmental youth worker, and on my newer role as a researcher. In 1956 Rachel Carson urged parents to take their children outside as "A child's world is fresh and new and beautiful... full of wonder

and excitement”.<sup>80</sup> She emphasized that, “Daily, intimate, sensory experience is essential to keep that wonder bright for a lifetime...the early companionship of a responsive adult is the best way to make it happen”.<sup>81</sup>

These wise words were spoken nearly sixty years ago, and have been echoed and added to over the years by many others including Richard Louv,<sup>82 83</sup> and most recently by the National Trust.<sup>84</sup> And I agree with them, it is important we encourage children to explore and discover a sense of wonder outside. However, children can also inspire us: they enable us to take a different perspective, to rediscover the world through their eyes. We just have to be able to get down to their level, to put down our mantle of sophistication and maturity, to be responsive and remember how to play. The world looks, smells, feels, sounds and tastes different when we do this: it’s more fun!

However, there is a serious side to this, when we experience nature, culture and family as *an interwoven entity*, the connections and attachments we make can be very strong and meaningful:<sup>85</sup> these are connections we make with each other and those we make with nature. Starting with soft toys, fairy tales and nursery rhymes,

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<sup>80</sup> Carson, R. (1956) *The Sense of Wonder*, New York: Harper and Row.

<sup>81</sup> Dunlap, J and Kellert, S.R. Eds. (2012) *Companions in Wonder: Children and Adults Exploring Nature Together*, London: The MIT Press.

<sup>82</sup> Louv, R. (2005) *Last Child in the Woods: saving our children form nature-deficit disorder*. North Carolina, USA: Algonquin Books of Chaple Hill.

<sup>83</sup> Louv, R. (2011) *The Nature Principle: Human restoration and the end of nature-deficit disorder*. North Carolina, USA: Algonquin Books of Chaple Hill.

<sup>84</sup> <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/what-we-do/big-issues/nature-and-outdoors/natural-childhood/>

<sup>85</sup> Derr, V. (2002) in Dunlap, J and Kellert, S.R. (eds.) (2012) *Companions in Wonder: Children and Adults Exploring Nature Together*, London: The MIT Press.

we can begin to explore the world of nature with children, introducing them to some of the creatures with whom we live, and helping them to feel a sense of familiarity and desire to learn more. As they grow and develop, we have progressively more opportunities to make this real, to take them outside and let them play – and it can be so much more fun if teddy (or rabbit) comes too! Perhaps children who know how to play in nature, and who value these experiences, will be more likely to grow up keen and able to play with their own children in a similar way. But what happens to those less fortunate than my nephew? Those who find themselves surrounded by adults who are ‘grown-ups’, who are not responsive, who don’t wave back to children who pass by on boats; people who have forgotten (or perhaps never knew) how to play? Possibly they feel too self-conscious when *mucking around with little ones*, as suggested by a recent consumer survey reported in a national newspaper.<sup>86</sup> What about the children and young people, who live separately from their families, or whose families are overwhelmed by dealing with more pressing concerns? What happens to the young people who enter adulthood never having experienced nature in this way? Who helps them to discover the wonder and then keep it bright? These questions have been playing in my mind, toying with my thoughts, philosophically making their way onto this paper.

I think I may have an answer to the last question: practitioners, facilitators, teachers, grandparents, carers, peers, you and me; we do our best to help them by providing outdoor experiences, in diverse guises. However, do we do enough? Do

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<sup>86</sup> Duggan, O. (2013) ‘Parents spend under an hour on child's play’, i-newspaper, 13th June, p.26.



we remember to be childlike (perhaps even childish?) in amongst dealing with the requirements for professionalism and responsibility to ensure we all stay safe, meet desired outcomes and can evidence learning? How do we provide opportunities like this for young people for whom such activities may appear to have little relevance, and who may cynically perceive them as too childish, after all, they're nearly adults? I believe we need to find a way. One way I have found effective in the past, has been through intergenerational work: helping to set up a teddy-bear hunt for younger siblings can be great fun for teenagers, result in more creatively hidden bears and thus a more interesting experience for the younger ones. Then afterwards, it is an experience that can be relived through sharing stories, each with their own perspective as hider or discoverer of the bears.

By making use of stories, we can help to develop a sense of belonging, of familiarity, comfort; we can engage, captivate, and encourage participation.<sup>87</sup> Stories enable us to make use of our imagination and reflections, and they can linger in our memory long after the experience. Stories can help make the link from the outer world to our inner world, and can be adapted to the specific context and culture. We can do this with people of all ages – from little children to adults; however, there is less time to do this with toys! A favourite toy from early childhood makes a good companion for those initial adventures: someone to share the stories with, to hang on to when we're feeling scared, and to cuddle when tired and sleepy. Unfortunately, for most (I exclude myself from this) a cuddly rabbit is usually

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<sup>87</sup> MacLellan, G. (2007) *Celebrating Nature* Somerset: Capall Bann Publishing

outgrown well before adolescence, consigned to a dusty shelf or tucked away in a cardboard box at the back of a cupboard. However, a chance discovery whilst looking for something else (a pair of walking boots perhaps?) can unlock the memories, allowing the discoverer to relive the experience and remember the wonder of nature – to renew the connections.

**My questions for you:**

- Within your programmes, do you make time and space for play?
- Do you encourage your participants to make use of their imaginations?
- Are you a good role model? By allowing others to see you play, you may inspire them to do the same.
- Do you share your stories, and listen when others tell you theirs?
- Finally, are you responsive – when you see a child wave at you, do you wave back?

I've seen many real rabbits since that magical day with my nephew, and each one reminds me of him. The sight of the rabbit takes me back and I relive the story of our time together. It serves as a connection, linking us through the time and space that separate us. Let us never underestimate the power of stories (and cuddly toy animals) to help us to understand and to enjoy time spent in nature. However, we should also remember that for the impact to be most powerful, the experience needs to be real: as my little nephew said at the beginning, we still need the real thing, and one day soon, we will take his toy rabbits to meet a real one! But that's another story...

## Chapter 7: Inclusiveness

This article was written at the start of my research study, and it incorporates many of the findings from my initial literature review and from my practical experiences prior to starting the PhD. It makes use of a well-known, fictional story to explore the concepts of social inclusion and outdoor education, and the challenges that may be encountered. I presented this to an international audience,<sup>88</sup> and it generated lively conversations about who we chose to walk with – and why. One sporty academic shared with me that she likes to walk fast, and has little patience for those who go slowly. We chose not to go walking together.

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### Article title: The Challenges of Social Inclusion in Outdoor Education

#### Can Tortoise and Hare learn together?

##### Abstract

This article makes use of Aesop's Fable, the Tortoise and the Hare, to explore how we can facilitate outdoor learning in a way that helps to develop connections with nature. For many, especially young people and those experiencing physical and/or mental ill health, stepping outside into a natural environment can be a real challenge. Some of the themes explored:

- Potential barriers to participation - when Doing gets in the way of Being in nature
- The role of the facilitator in fostering comfort rather than initiating concern (distress)
- The use of stories within outdoor education to foster familiarity, comfort and connections.

**Key words:** young people; stories; nature; comfort; adventure.

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<sup>88</sup> Hence the opening paragraphs explaining who I am and inviting participation in the session. It was subsequently included in the post-conference proceedings, and sections of it have been included in subsequent publications/presentations for different audiences.

## **Introduction**

I'm a Doctoral Researcher at the University of Cumbria, researching into the connections that young people have with the natural environment. Within my research, I am concentrating on the voice of young people: what they think about nature, what they enjoy doing outdoors, how 'connected' do they feel, and does this impact on their perception of their health and well-being or on their desire to look after natural spaces. As you read this paper, I invite you to take a couple of minutes to think about the adventures you had outdoors as a child/young person. Where did you go? What did you do? Who was with you? What was your inspiration for doing this – why did you go outside? If you want, note down your thoughts or turn to the person next to you and share your story with them.

My practical experiences as an environmental youth worker and as a trainer of youth and community workers, together with my academic research, have highlighted the importance in some situations of generating a relaxed, gentle atmosphere that encourages sharing of thoughts. Many people feel intimidated by those who lead more adventurous outdoor lives than them: we need to be mindful that for them the words 'an adventure outside' means playing in their back garden or a trip to the local park, rather than trekking in the Andes! Who we have our adventures with is so important: outdoor adventures, whatever the inherent level of risk, are a good way of encouraging us to explore together, to discover new things about ourselves as well as others and to make new connections. However, perhaps the biggest challenge for those of us working within this industry is how to ensure that we do not inadvertently intimidate or discourage others from joining

us. How do we achieve genuine social inclusion, where everyone feels able to participate at a level that is comfortable and relevant to them? I suggest ways in which more people might be enabled to experience the outdoors through environmentally and socially responsible experiences.

I argue that a one size fits all adventurous approach to Outdoor Education does not work, we need to allow space and time (and comfort) for a more diverse population to participate in genuine, meaningful experiences. We need to encourage people to develop confidence and take their own footsteps, not just to follow in ours: their way may be better. Perhaps contentiously, I will also be arguing AGAINST social inclusion, at least in its more usual guises, in some situations, and presenting a case for exclusion.

### **The story of the Tortoise and the Hare**

A HARE one day ridiculed the short feet and slow pace of the Tortoise. The latter, laughing, said: Though you be swift as the wind, I will beat you in a race. The Hare, deeming her assertion to be simply impossible, assented to the proposal; and they agreed that the Fox should choose the course, and fix the goal.

On the day appointed for the race, they started together. The Tortoise never for a moment stopped, but went on with a slow but steady pace straight to the end of the course. The Hare, trusting to his native swiftness, cared little about the race, and lying down by the wayside, fell fast asleep. At last waking up, and moving as fast as he could, he saw the Tortoise had reached the goal, and was comfortably dozing after her fatigue.

Moral: Perseverance is surer than swiftness (Aesop's Fables, 1881).

Aesop's Fable is one of many stories, fables and fairy tales that can be used to explore how we can facilitate outdoor learning in a way that helps to develop

connections with the natural environment, building on, rather than challenging, people's individual comfort zones. It is a story familiar to many of us, often used to illustrate the importance of taking a slow and steady approach to life, and as an activity within team-building sessions. However, in reality it is a race that is unlikely to happen. Tortoise is more likely to take one look at Hare, in his waterproof, windproof, moisture-managing, fell-running kit, complete with shoes with heavily studded soles and decide not to bother! Tomorrow, he could go for a nice, gentle walk with other tortoises, amongst whom he would feel more at ease, sharing their stories, and thus more able to enjoy the experience. Although Hare was disappointed, he knew he'd have won the race, he was also secretly relieved: he'd much rather race another hare, much more of a challenge for such a competitive animal. However, as facilitators of outdoor activities, where does that leave us? How do we offer activities that are socially inclusive, that can accommodate the needs of both the hares and tortoises in life? Should we even try to get them to participate together, at the same time? And why have I chosen to use a story to discuss social inclusion? Because this approach is something most people feel comfortable with, it is a method familiar to them:

'Since ancient times, sharing stories and unified metaphors has created commonality in our seemingly separate yet interpenetrating realities. It is the choice of shared language that contributes to shared meaning' (Forest, 2006, p.2).

I have chosen to utilise an animal fable, as this genre is well suited for exploring social issues: the animals serve to 'highlight contradistinctions between rich and poor, just and unjust, powerful and powerless...' (Röhrich, 2008, p.150 in

Katsadoros, 2011, p.110). Often, as in the case of the tortoise and the hare, the story contains an inversion of the normal state of affairs, a reversal of expectations; this can be a useful way of challenging established structures and hierarchies (Ibid.). Although this paper aims to be a gentle (dare I say comfortable) discursive exploration of the topic, I should make it clear that I come from a socially critical perspective,

‘The socially critical approach treats environmental crises as symptoms of a larger problem in our society (Huckle, 1983)—namely, the dominant role of economic considerations and the unequal distribution of resources’ (Stevenson, 2007, p.142).

I have made a conscious choice to be a youth worker rather than a teacher, and to have more of a focus on the environment than on outdoor activities. I prefer the name of environmental youth worker, which aptly describes my approach to life; paraphrasing Huckle (Ibid.) I make use of a socially critical approach to ‘young people issues’ and to environmental issues, seeing them both as a result of inequality. My argument may appear to be a personal, individual one, however I invite you to explore the political and societal issues embedded within: mine is not a lone voice, it is just the dominant one in this particular paper.

There are many potential barriers to participation, some political, some social, some cultural, here I am going to focus on when *Doing* gets in the way of *Being* in nature. So, who is responsible for this? Parents/carers; teachers/instructors; US! In significant ways, students’ experiential contact with the natural world is being curtailed and shaped...when they are “allowed” outside, their contact is structured,

prescribed and limited '...the kind of inductive learning that arises from relatively unstructured, outdoor activity is increasingly marginalized' (Roberts, 2012, p.99).

Sometimes we are so busy doing things, learning new skills, undertaking high risk activities that we do not allow enough time for just being there. As practitioners, we may be afraid of inactivity, of allowing our participants to be bored, fearing (often with good cause) that it will lead to misbehaviour or worse, dangerous behaviour.

'Is their challenging behaviour actually a coping mechanism, a form of communication? Are we actively listening to them? And if we are, how are we acting on what we hear? How do we respond to challenge?' (Shaughnessy and Hayes, 2012, p.2).

We need to take account of our epistemological, ontological and pedagogical beliefs: these influence what and how we teach, they influence what form of knowledge we select, how we organise and subsequently deliver this to other people. I became a practitioner in outdoor settings because I like being outdoors, I am more comfortable in a wood than in a classroom, and I choose to make use of stories because I like stories: however, I must not assume that others feel the same way (Zink and Burrows, 2008).

There is also the inherent challenge that one person's concept of being in nature is another's doing in nature: these are subjective terms. I am also conscious that when promoting opportunities to 'be in nature' I run the risk of being perceived as a promoter of mystical, perhaps serious, meditative and mindful, therapeutic experiences. This is something I aim to explore more in future papers, particularly in relation to identity; for the purpose of this paper, I am suggesting something more



akin to 'being ourselves in nature', a chance to relax and perhaps to play, in a manner reminiscent of childhood.

Every time we design, advertise, promote a new type of adventure we are adding to the language used to define this type of experience. The words we use, the way we express them, the images we choose to accompany the text, determine the response from the recipients of our communications. For every new person we attract, we potentially risk losing numerous more. We need to think carefully about what we are offering, and why. Are we offering more choice, a more diverse range of activities for those already likely to be participating? Perhaps something more adventurous, scarier, a chance to take things to 'the next level'? Or are we trying to attract a more diverse range of participants, who are currently not included/are excluded? These are two very different things.

In this discussion, we should also explore the relationship between exclusion, participation, and under-representation, we need to define the terms to apply them to social inclusion:

- Participation measures observed behaviour - it is the percentage of all people doing a certain activity who belong to a specific group.
- Representation is a meta-statistic - it is the ratio of 'the participation of a specific group in a certain activity' to 'the proportion of that group in the background population as a whole'.
- Exclusion expresses how people feel (their perceptions). (OPENspace, 2008)

We can quantify participation and representation, using data from statistical surveys, however exclusion cannot automatically be inferred from

underrepresentation; a group that we identify as under-represented may not feel excluded, if it has full access to opportunities to participate, but still declines.

At this point I am reminded of a close friend's response to hearing of my imminent move to Cumbria, that she was looking forward to visiting me, but wouldn't be doing any of '*those walks*', she would wait in a tea room until our return. This is a woman who spends much of her life outdoors, walking her dog, gardening, growing vegetables, supporting her son at rugby. Yet she was opting out – why? Because of her perception of what walking in Cumbria would mean. I did not overtly challenge her, instead I quietly shared my story of one of my recent experiences. I had gone out for an adventure with a small group of others, we took a boat trip across a lake then walked back along the shore. A low level, undemanding route, full of wildlife and opportunities to get to know the place, and each other: no pressure, no fuss, little cost. As I finished she smiled and said, '*I'd like to do that*'. Something we could do together, and then reminisce over with a cup of tea. However, would that be enough for everyone? Would it be enough for you? For many this type of adventure would seem boring, and a waste of their time. Which is ok, they have the choice to opt out of our adventure.

So, what do we actually mean by social inclusion: who needs to be included, and who does the including? And, more to the point, why were they excluded in the first place? I find this language, and the approach it attempts to explain, problematic. I agree with Edwards and Miller (2000) and Labonte (2004) that there is an embedded contradiction in the social inclusion/exclusion debate:

‘How does one go about including individuals and groups in a set of structured social relationships responsible for excluding them in the first place?...To what degree might we consider wilful social exclusion by groups an important moment of conflict, an empowered act of resistance to socio-economic systems that, by their logic and rules, continue to replicate and heighten the material hierarchies of inequality?’ (Labonte, 2004, p.117)

Inclusion is generally viewed as a good thing, however ‘the notion of inclusion precisely entails the work of exclusion’ (Edwards and Miller, 2000, p.2). You can’t have one without the other. We have a tendency to place the emphasis on inclusion rather than challenging the cause of the exclusion.

At this point, I am going to return to the Tortoise and the Hare – you may be wondering where do they fit in all of this? I have made use of them as a metaphor for two arguably, extreme, approaches to outdoor activities: the ‘fast, adventurous, race to the top’ type, and the slower, enjoying the journey, ‘not actually bothered if I don’t make it to the top’ type. In doing this, I also acknowledge that experienced outdoor practitioners are aware of the need to allow for reflection, for thinking time so that participants can make sense of their experiences and identify their learning. I would also like to make use of the fable to talk about the commodification of outdoor experiences that often require expensive resources and equipment. A whole industry has arisen to meet the demand for adventure and outdoor experiences – we are evidence of that! Where the norm used to be inexpensive adventures in our gardens, school grounds and local parks, we now rely on designated centres, nature reserves and theme parks to do this for us. What were once simple, free activities accessible to all, have become expensive,

complicated experiences, requiring special equipment that meets all relevant health and safety legislation. This causes exclusion: for those with less financial resources, less knowledge or confidence in outdoor settings, or come from a cultural background that does not see a value in these types of activities.

Yet, I take comfort from the fact that there is an ever-growing voice of dissent within the field, as expressed by Roberts (2012, p.97): 'How do we avoid the 'McDonaldization of experience' with its values of efficiency, predictability, calculability, and control?' Even well-meaning organisations, and experienced practitioners risk doing this. Are our attempts to make the outdoors accessible to those whom the commercialisation excludes (Breeze, 2013) actually more about including them in the commercialization? We really do need to think carefully, and critically about this, and it is an issue that has been debated for some time (for example: Loynes, 1998, 2002), with recognition that there is a dominant masculine voice in the world of outdoor learning, which gives the impression that there is only one way to do things. And the personal issue for me is that it did not represent my way of doing things; and at the political level I wanted to challenge it. These writers acknowledge the emergence of new paradigms, including the generative paradigm that is more influenced by feminine ideologies, and is supportive of creative interpretation of experience (Loynes, 2002). However, challenging existing structures and historical hierarchies takes time, and determination, especially when the established dominant voice holds such power and access to resources. There is a danger that the newer, more generative, creative paradigms will be dismissed as too 'fluffy' and 'soft', less relevant than the more traditional, harder, risky character-building 'stuff' of adventure education. A rhetorical question was asked

during one of the key note speeches at a recent adventure tourism conference that I attended, *'Who wants to go on a soft adventure?'* perhaps in the expectation we would all say, *'not me'*; however, my answer would be *'Bring it on, I'm more than ready'*. I am sure there are others like me, it is just that our voices tend to be more difficult to hear than others.

We have become adept at considering those who have become excluded, and, in the name of social inclusion, developing methods of 'reaching them', to include them in what we offer. However, I think we also need to listen to those who have chosen to opt out, to exclude themselves from 'outdoor activities' and to consider why. It is not enough to simply provide them with resources and materials to enable them to participate in what we offer, what WE like doing. We need to explore other ways of being outdoors. We need to address the apparent hierarchical nature of activities being labelled as soft or hard, risky or safe, with the inherent implication that one is inferior to the other. To do this,

'We need to rethink, to think differently: to use our imaginations again...metaphorical language is a way of rethinking and questioning orthodox thinking. A metaphor is what it does...reorients consciousness' (Greene and Griffiths, 2003, p.85).

One way we can do this is by making use of metaphors and stories to foster familiarity, comfort, to make connections and as a hook to gain attention. Stories can engage, captivate, and encourage participation. They can be personal/impersonal, use imagination, make use of our memories and reflections, and they can linger in our memory long after the experience. They are a form of education by stealth, when we don't realise we are learning until afterwards. Narrative stories provide us with a way of understanding experience; when we

listen to a story, or read someone's story, we have a glimpse into their world, as they perceive it, and as they choose to share it with us.

When we use our own stories, or those of others, for research, we give testimony to what we have witnessed, and that testimony creates a voice (Etherington, 2004, p.9). When we tell a story, especially if it is 'our' story, we enable others to begin to understand us. We can choose what to say, how to interpret our experiences, how much (or little) we feel comfortable to share. When we communicate our stories in written form, in text,

'They are language made solid, conversations frozen in print and picture. To understand texts is to understand the messages passing between members of society' (Rennie Short, 1991, p.157).

Stories provide a recognisable way of constructing meaning *based on culturally defined and historically situated interpretations and personal experiences* (Sarantakos, 2005, p.39). We learn to recognise things, to become familiar with them and to make use of them to interpret and to understand our world. Stories told outdoors have a very special quality, especially if they incorporate things that can be interpreted in a sensory way: they can help make the link from the outer world to our inner world, and can be adapted to the specific context and culture.

For the less confident storyteller there are numerous books that can help; for the more confident, the natural world provides endless resources and inspiration. However, we should remember that our own stories can be the most powerful of all.

With narratives or stories, the salient message is retained without the “teller” being perceived as authoritarian, dictatorial or prescriptive. Because the interpretation of storytelling is open and creative, participants can bring their own experiences and modes of understanding to the reflective process (Gray and Stuart, 2012).

The one size fits all, off-the shelf packages approach to outdoor education, as espoused by the need for challenge and risk, for stepping outside of your comfort zone, and undertaking a high-level adventure, does not always work: for some people, it may work for some of the time, in some contexts; for others, it may create anxiety, distress and discomfort, when it would be more beneficial to enable them to enjoy space, peace of mind and comfort.

‘Whenever we achieve the satisfaction of our expectations and anxiety dissolves, we feel as if we were in a comfort zone – safe, complete, free from risks and in peace with ourselves. We might even have a little taste of heaven when we feel that we have fulfilled our duty’ (Zacharias, 2012, p.1).

This is the position that I prefer to work from, as a learner and as a facilitator of learning in others. I dispute the ‘urban myth’ in outdoor education that encourages people to move outside their comfort zone, to stretch themselves, as a way to achieve effective learning. What do we mean by comfort zone? Is this a model or a metaphor? This is a highly contested and debated matter, much of which falls outside the scope of this paper; I will be taking the term to represent a model often used within adventure and outdoor education literature as the basis for personal growth and transformation (Brown, 2008). I am wary of the apparent need by some outdoor educators to create a perception of risk and challenge to induce stress as a

way to achieve growth and change in participants. Like Davis-Berman and Berman (2002 in Brown, 2008) I argue that *the greatest amount of change comes when participants feel safe, secure and accepted* (Ibid., p.11). This is of utmost importance when working with young people who are experiencing social exclusion, and whose everyday lives may be full of stress and challenge.

The inherent dualistic nature of contemplative and adventurous experiences makes it a challenge for facilitators: is it possible to do both? Whilst some would argue that there is space and time at the top of mountain, after the climb has been achieved, to contemplate and reflect. There will always be others who prefer to contemplate and reflect as they go, and are perfectly happy not to reach the top of the mountain: 'Does success in including one group come at the expense of excluding another?' (Labonte, 2004, p.119). I agree with Brown (2008, p.11):

'Let us provide students with favourable conditions for authentic and meaningful experiences where they are challenged in an appropriate manner and suitably supported by those with a genuine interest in their learning...'

I would go further, and argue we need to enable them to feel comfortable outdoors, to feel a sense of belonging. We need to remember the power of curiosity, awe, wonder and imagination in stimulating the senses, to allow space for curiosity, undirected attention, and natural inspiration. There is a growing awareness of the need for enchantment and for increased *attention to* '... "reenchantment"—the phenomena of sensory, emotional, and nonrational ways of connecting with the earth's living systems' (Barlett, 2008, p.1077). I would like to



see more playful activities for all ages, not just for those of pre-school and primary age.

This viewpoint is increasingly being recognised by others in the field of outdoor education (for example Nicol, 2012) and the wider world of education. At this point I should also say that I find the language we use to structure and categorise our work as problematic: who gets to define adventure education? Is it outdoor education or education outdoors? Education or learning? And what do we mean by outdoors anyway? (Zink and Burrows, 2008). These are all points I will be exploring within my research.

I want to redefine adventure for all, as experiences that are unusual and exciting, and may sometimes be daring, at a level appropriate and relevant to the individual. I want recognition that for some people an adventure in their back garden can be as effective a learning experience as climbing a mountain. This to me is the central tenet of social inclusion. As outdoor educators, we need to allow sufficient space and time for people to be in nature, not just to do things in or to nature (whether that is adventurous activities or practical conservation) – in a way that is meaningful and relevant for them and enables them to reflect on their experiences and to make sense of them (Hayes, 2012).

So how does this relate to my PhD research? I will be conducting research with a mix of people, at all levels of adventurousness. They will be from a range of projects – some with a focus on adventure/outdoor activities, others on youth development, with a remit to tackling social inclusion, yet others with a focus on conservation

and/or sustainability issues. The common link is that they are ALL young people, aged 11-25, involved in facilitated activities in outdoor settings. I will be inviting them to share with me their story of their outdoor experiences. Some will be gathered through face to face interviews, some via email, whichever method the young person is comfortable with. I will then be undertaking thematic analysis of their stories, followed by I-Poem analysis of some of them, which is a method that helps place the focus on their voice (not mine): I'm looking forward to hearing their stories.

### **Concluding remarks**

Stories can be evocative, provocative, used to illustrate or elicit a reaction. They link the past to the present to the future; they can be reflective, a day dream or a memory. They can help to explain or to add meaning to experiences:

'All our explanations can be seen as stories. Whether we call them myths, legends, fables or hard fact, they are all stories. Our most precious scientific processes are still stories: patterns spun to explain observations, rhythms of words that change and grow as our understanding changes and patterns that might help to explain what is going on around us ...we all hunger for stories...' (MacLellan, 2007, p.165).

One of the dominant underlying assumptions in outdoor and adventure education is the need for risk, stretch and being challenged out of your comfort zone, at the expense of more contemplative, gentler experiences.

Through my research, like Nicol (2012, p.8), I will be exploring ways in which lived experiences bring together mind, body and world; however, whilst Nicol feels the need to challenge the view that adventurous activities are fun whilst environmental

education activities are dull (Nicol, 2001 in Nicol, 2012, p.10), for me, environmental activities have always been fun. It's just that sometimes, other people's need for speed, for adventure, for risky and dangerous adventures gets in the way of my adventures. Their DOING impedes my BEING in nature. And as a practitioner, attempting to satisfy the demands of such diverse participants, to be socially inclusive and mindful of diversity, it can be a challenge too far. When our work involves very diverse groups, for example, family groups including five-year olds and 50-year olds, some with disabilities, can we create programmes which are truly accessible to all? Perhaps, if we work in a way that is responsive to individuals, is needs-led and tailored to the specific needs of the specific participants (Breeze, op. cit.). However, this means that all involved need to sign up to shared aims and objectives, which is not always possible in practice. So, next time you are planning to organise a race to the top of a mountain, or a long-distance kayaking expedition, count me out – I will opt for exclusion, but remember this is my choice. It is right that I should be invited, but it is equally right for my refusal to be accepted for what it is: my choice. We all have the right to choose.

Now for the last time, let's return to the Tortoise and the Hare with a final question: what about the other animals that could join the race? The foxes, owls, butterflies or rabbits, where were they when the decision was taken to hold a race? Did anyone invite them to join in? My guess is that they were too busy being in nature and doing their own thing to bother about a silly race! Shame we didn't get to hear their side of the story, it may have been more interesting.

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## Chapter 8: Playfulness

This paper has been published in the form of a chapter in an academic book <sup>89</sup> and its theme arose from my primary research. Playfulness and the chance to play were talked about by young people and practitioners alike, as important within outdoor learning experiences; this discovery was confirmed by my ethnographic observations, and autoethnographical reflections. The article takes a theoretical approach to the topic, and utilises a fictional story to exemplify key points. It is informed by my primary research, however this was not overtly included, as I was still in the early stages of analysis. This article was written in third person to meet the publishers' requirements. <sup>90</sup>

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### Article title: Playful approaches to outdoor learning

#### Boggarts, Bears and Bunny Rabbits!

##### Abstract

This chapter adopts a playful approach to explore outdoor learning for young people, utilizing a fictional story to engage the reader's attention. It outlines the core concepts of youth work and considers the importance of emotions within outdoor learning. These concepts are then applied to outdoor learning experiences, through an interpretive, hermeneutic process of asking questions and suggesting possible answers. The reader is also encouraged to consider their own interpretations of the story and to consider its potential application within their own practice. The chapter starts and ends with a gentle challenge to readers from one of the characters within the story, aiming to make reading this an interactive, thought-provoking experience, whereby the reader reflects on their own experiences and

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<sup>89</sup> Hayes T (2015) 'Playful Approaches to Outdoor Learning: Boggarts, Bears and Bunny Rabbits!' In: Horton J and Evans B (eds.) *Play, Recreation, Health and Well Being*, Vol.9 of Skelton, T. (ed.) *Geographies of Children and Young People*. Springer, Singapore.

<sup>90</sup> The exceptions to this, are the Bear and Rabbit characters who address the reader using first person.

begins to engage in the wider debate of how to support others to develop an awareness and appreciation of the world around them. It encourages the use of creative, playful activities within outdoor learning and the value of storytelling as a method of engagement. Arguably one of the most dominant underlying assumptions in outdoor learning is the need to be challenged to 'step out of your comfort zone'. This chapter offers an alternative perspective and invites the reader to come into a comfortable, safe discursive place and join in a playful exploration of outdoor learning.

**Keywords:** Outdoor learning; young people; nature; stories; creativity; playfulness; youth work; comfort

## **Introduction**

This chapter draws on literature from a wide range of disciplines including experiential, outdoor and adventure education; environment; child development and play, as well as from children's geographies, which itself has a diverse foundation (Kraftl et al., 2014). As a result, it represents an eclectic and amorphous body of literature which aims to encourage readers to engage in the wider, interdisciplinary debate of how adult ideas of childhood serve to construct the socio-spatial organisation of outdoor learning experiences for children (Holloway et al., 2010). In the last two decades, there has been both a rapid decline in the number of outdoor play spaces for children and young people, and a fundamental change in the types of play, with a massive increase in indoor and technological games (Bingley and Milligan, 2004). Its relevance to children's geographers is that the sub-discipline of children's geographies has long been recognised as a place that utilizes creative methodologies, resulting in '...diverse, challenging, exciting, creative, and interdisciplinary work' (Kraftl et al., Ibid.). This chapter pays homage to, and further develops, that tradition.

A gentle challenge from Bear: “Before reading further, please take a little time to think about the adventures you had outdoors as a child. Where did you go? What did you do? Who was with you? What was your inspiration for doing this – why did you go outside? Now, if you are sitting comfortably, I will share one of my stories with you.”

“28...29...30! Coming, ready or not!” Bear removed his paws from his eyes, turned away from the tree trunk against which he had rested his head, and stared intently into the wood. Where were they hiding? Agreeing to play hide and seek with Boggart and Bunny Rabbit had seemed a good idea, but now he was beginning to have doubts. It was so dark at night in the woods. There were strange noises and weird shadows, and he felt alone and scared. With so many wonderful hiding places, how on earth would he find them? Trembling, he shuffled forward, eyes peering into the gloom...suddenly he spotted a flash of white! It was Bunny’s tail – found her! She was trying to hide behind a large rock near the edge of the path, squirming her body into the soft, peaty soil. But as the moon’s rays pierced the leafy canopy, the light caught the white of her tail, making it sparkle and glow. She giggled as she realised she’d been spotted and cheerfully skipped over to Bear’s side. One down, one to go: but at least now he had Bunny to help him look. He felt instantly braver, with Bunny by his side.

Together they scoured the wood, Bear gazing up high into the branches, was Boggart hiding there? Bunny bouncing down into the hollows beneath the trees, under the bushes, deep in the ditches...but Boggart was nowhere to be seen. “Stay near the path”, they’d decided. “No more than 30 seconds away from each other – important to stay safe” they’d agreed.

Bear cursed loudly, and shook his head. How could he have been so stupid? Everyone knows that Boggarts can’t be trusted to play fair! And they are experts at hiding: you can go a lifetime without ever seeing one, in fact most people do! Grumpily, Bear called out “Boggart, we give up, you win!” Bunny tiredly hopped up and nestled into his arms as they began the long walk home.

“Boo!” Boggart landed on the path in front of them, making them jump. “Whose turn is it to hide next?” Bear scowled and carried on walking...

The path through this chapter starts with a story as a means of engaging the reader’s attention and encouraging them to participate in this conversation about playful outdoor learning, interpreted through creative writing. The path wanders on to consider each of the three characters in turn, offering possible interpretations by



asking three questions: what does this character represent? What does this character contribute to the story? What perspective is embodied in this character? It will then move on to consider the story as a whole and the characters' interactions within the story, introducing some of the themes/concepts embedded within and emerging from it. In the hermeneutic tradition of 'questionableness' (Nixon, 2014), the chapter will end, not with conclusions, but with more questions to encourage further contemplation. To finish there will be another gentle challenge from one of the characters in the story (more of that later). The author's purpose in utilising a story in this way is threefold: to encourage readers to engage in the debate of how to support young people to develop an awareness and appreciation of the world around them; to consider barriers that may prevent young people accessing outdoor places and for each reader to consider their own role – what do they do to (dis)encourage young people to develop a sense of belonging in outdoor places.

### **Setting the scene**

The story that introduces this chapter is an example of the way metaphorical stories, fables and fairy tales can be used to explore how to facilitate outdoor learning in a way that helps to develop a positive relationship with the natural environment. Using stories is an approach with which most people feel comfortable, a familiar method used since 'ancient times' based on a recognisable, shared language 'that contributes to shared meaning' (Forest, 2006, p.2). The events selected to make up a story may be real, imaginary, or part-way between the two (Winter et al., 1999). This story is based on a simple childhood game that can be instantly recognised by most people: Hide and Seek. It feels familiar and safe,

however within it are some complex issues to be explored, including: fear of the dark/unknown/being alone; comfort/discomfort outside; experiential/sensory learning; labelling/stereotyping; (mis)trust; leadership and teamwork; sense of place and of belonging; role of the facilitator; types of activities and emotional responses to them; planning/health and safety/risk assessments and dealing with the unexpected! It also encourages consideration of the use of creative, playful activities within outdoor learning and the value of storytelling as a method of engagement.

### **What is outdoor learning?**

Outdoor learning is a term that encompasses a wide range of activities including: play; school grounds projects; environmental education; recreational and adventure activities, as well as personal and social development programmes (IOL, 2014).<sup>91</sup>

This chapter focuses on youth work that occurs outside of school/college, acknowledging that much of current youth work practice takes place within these formal settings. This is further defined as youth work which takes place outdoors. Youth work has the core aims of participation and active involvement; equity, diversity and inclusion; partnership with young people and others; and personal, social and political development (Smith, 2013). Perhaps the most defining, and some would say sacrosanct, characteristic of youth work is that it is a voluntary relationship: young people choose whether or not to participate. When considering young people, it is important to take a holistic view: to understand what happens during this transitional phase of a person's life account must be taken of their

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<sup>91</sup> Although not discussed explicitly in this paper, the term outdoor learning also incorporates conservation education, nature studies and field studies, as these are forms of learning that take place outdoors, or focus, on nature.

earlier experiences, their social, cultural and political contexts. This phase of a person's life marks the transition from childhood to adulthood, a boundary crossing: when '... childhood ends and adulthood begins is obscured by the liminal period of youth' (Valentine, 2003, p.38). Children's geographers understand childhood as a process: it is not a phase to be grown out of; it is a part of a lifelong process that shapes and defines a person.

### **Play, recreation and nature**

Like childhood and youth, play, recreation and nature are all contested, culturally-specific words that encompass a wide range of concepts (Barker et al., 2009) – each is worthy of a book in its own right! For the purpose of the dialogue here, the words will be applied in the following way: play is defined as free play: '... children choosing what they want to do, how they want to do it and when to stop and try something else. Free play has no external goals set by adults and has no adult imposed curriculum' (Santer et al., 2007, p.xi).

The focus here is on playfulness, the mood state that facilitates and accompanies 'playful play'. It may not be observable in behaviour – playful individuals are not necessarily playing, even though they are in a playful mood; we can think playfully as well as act playfully. It is a way of generating new thought patterns in a protected context (Bateson and Martin, 2013). To illustrate this point, this chapter is written in a playful way, with a view to enabling readers to feel comfortable and safe, yet at the same time gently challenging their existing thought patterns and encouraging them to think about things in a slightly different way. Recreation can be defined as 'something people do to relax or have fun...activities done for enjoyment;

refreshment of strength and spirits after work; also, a means of refreshment or diversion (Merriam-Webster, no date). Moving on to the third term, there are many different definitions of nature, and it is a highly-contested concept, which is not explored in-depth here; instead this chapter uses the everyday definition of nature as the physical world and everything in it (such as plants, animals, mountains, oceans, stars, etc.) that is not made by people, as well as the natural forces that control what happens in the world. This definition does not ignore that much of what is thought of as a 'natural environment' is actually manufactured, moulded and manipulated by humans: it does however provide some parameters for the discussion being held here.

Bringing together play, recreation and nature...creates playful activities that occur outside of school/work in an outdoor, 'natural place'. This natural place can be a woodland, field, hillside or beach: the place as such is not necessarily important; it is how it is perceived by the people that are using it as somewhere different from their non-recreational places (work, school, etc.). It is a place that allows people to relax, have fun, socialise, enjoy themselves – to refresh their spirits in a natural environment. The restorative powers and health benefits of nature are commonly acknowledged and many people will state they feel better when they are outside (Ulrich, 1984; Maas et al., 2006; Mind, 2007; Hartig et al., 1991; Kaplan, 1995; Pretty et al., 2005; Fuller et al., 2007). However, the lives of many westernised children and young people do not allow much space for contact with the natural environment (Louv, 2009; White and Stoecklin, 2008; Ridgers et al., 2012): their lives tend to be more urban, indoors-based and '...much more structured,

supervised and scheduled with few opportunities to explore and interact with the natural environment...' (White and Stoecklin, *Ibid.*, p.5). This trend is one element of what is seen by many as an alarming deterioration in children/young people's understanding and appreciation of the world they live in: this is explained in detail by Sue Palmer in *Toxic Childhood* (Palmer, 2006), a book in which she urges parents, carers and those who facilitate learning to enable their children to play outside more. However, Ridgers et al. (2012) emphasize that whilst parents may be concerned that their children have fewer opportunities to play, they also have increased concerns regarding risk: '...the changing nature of play is closely linked to societal changes in safety attitudes' (*Ibid.*, p.49).

In many of the current debates, experience of nature is conceptualised as (dis)connection to nature or (dis)connectivity; it has been suggested that in contrast to older people, many young people do not have a connection with nature, indeed they have an 'alarming lack of awareness of even the basic elements of nature' (Bendon, 2009). This increasing disconnectivity is of serious concern to geographers, environmentalists and educationalists alike, and there are theories such as nature deficit disorder, biophilia/biophobia, disconnection from nature that have been developed with the intention of highlighting and hopefully addressing this issue. Despite this, '...children are disappearing from the outdoors at a rate that would make the top of any conservationist's list of endangered species if they were any other member of the animal kingdom...' (Gill, 2005 in Muñoz 2009, p.20)

The awareness of the diminished opportunities for direct experience of nature during childhood highlights the irreplaceable role of children's direct experience of

nature as integral to their healthy growth and development referred to as the 'naturalistic necessity' (Kellert, 2012) and as 'Vitamin N' (Louv, 2013). Experience of nature can take several forms including: direct experience (for example unstructured play and contact with wild places, self-sustaining nature); indirect experiences (such as structured/facilitated contact with 'managed' nature that 'requires ongoing human input for its survival, like a garden, a potted plant, or a pet'), and representational experiences of nature, for example through story, toys, computer or images (Kellert, 2012, p.133). The story used here is a representational experience of nature, however the characters are also composites of young people encountered by the author through her lived experiences as a practitioner and researcher – and as a parent. Utilizing representational characters adds a little distance to the discussion: it averts the viewpoint away from individual human beings, and enables the story to be located within a range of different contexts and cultures: in other words, it has been simplified to enable the spotlight to remain more tightly focussed.

Utilising non-human characters – real and imaginary – is a recognised method to explore emotional, moral, social issues (Winter et al., 1999): the characters can be viewed as a set of actors that embody the author's perspective; each character serves to highlight a particular aspect and their interactions bring out the meaning of the story. Through the processes of writing and sharing fictional stories, it is possible to examine values and to explore (interpret) experiences – to move towards an understanding of their meaning. In contrast to the fictional stories of A. A. Milne, in this story Rabbit represents fun, good naturedness and spontaneity, not

bossiness; Bear represents safety, security and responsibility, not the infant self as represented by Pooh Bear. Boggart represents... well that is for the reader to interpret/define at this stage, although some guidance will be provided later in the chapter.

### **The characters**

This section will address each character in turn, in the order in which they appear, addressing the three questions asked earlier: What does this character represent? What does this character contribute to the story? What perspective is embodied in this character?

#### **Bear**

What is a bear? It can be defined as ‘any one of a group of large and heavy animals (scientific family name *Ursidae*) that have thick hair and sharp claws and that can stand on two legs like a person’ or as ‘something that is difficult to do or deal with’ (Merriam-Webster, op. cit.) as in a burden to bear. Metaphorically both definitions could be applied to this character: the bear in this story can be seen as dependable, sensible and responsible, all of which carry an inherent sense of duty and burden. Bear could be interpreted as a real animal or as a toy: that is purposively left open to interpretation, depending on the context and audience for the story. It could also be seen to represent either the role of the facilitator, the one responsible for ‘managing’ the activity; or it could be a peer, alongside Bunny and Boggart, with joint responsibility for the activity. It is again deliberately left open to the reader’s interpretation, allowing the story to serve more than one purpose and to be used as a discussion prompt in a range of contexts.

Characters and personality traits that could be seen to be represented by Bear include: a love of rules and structure; dislike of unpredictability and the unexpected; respect for health and safety; risk averse; strong sense of fair play and justice; thoughtfulness and caring – although perhaps a tendency to being grumpy when things don't go as planned. This character is seen to gain strength and confidence from having a companion, feeling braver when there is someone with whom to share the game. It could be argued that this character is representative of those who prefer to stay within their comfort zone, with things that are familiar and who like to be in control of proceedings.

Indeed, Bear's explicit contribution to the story is as the 'director' of the game – the game starts and ends when Bear says so, whether the others are ready or not. These simple words, an integral part of the game of hide and seek, could be interpreted in a threatening way. The bear's inner monologue provides the reader with an understanding of events leading up to this point: how the rules and parameters of the game were agreed between the three characters. But it also provides an insight into Bear's implicit contributions to the story: identifying (labelling?) Boggart as untrustworthy: "Everyone knows that Boggarts can't be trusted to play fair!" In this way, Bunny and the readers are encouraged to align their perspective with that of Bear, in a manner that reflects how cultural norms and stereotypes are established. This statement is backed up with evidence that links the lack of visibility of Boggarts with their untrustworthiness.

### **Bunny Rabbit**

The rabbit here is named as a Bunny indicating that it is more likely to be a toy than a mammal (which would simply be called a rabbit, or if being scientific, *Oryctolagus*



*cuniculus*). This character represents the personality traits of good humour, friendliness, enthusiasm and playfulness. Inherent within the character's description is youthfulness and lack of guile: Bunny is seen to 'go with the flow': happy to snuggle into Bear's arms when tired, and to finish the game when directed by Bear. Implicit within this character are more contentious issues of gender and power imbalance as both Bear and Bunny have specified genders: Bear is male and Bunny is female. As a female, she giggles, her tail sparkles in the light, she is cheerful and happy to be looked after/cared for by the bigger, stronger male character.

This character's contribution to the story is as a counterbalance to Bear: they can be interpreted as opposites of one another. Whilst Bear appears uncomfortable outside in the wood at night, Bunny is at ease in the natural environment: "...trying to hide behind a large rock near the edge of the path, squirming her body into the soft, peaty soil". However, she is also silent, except for a giggle. The story does not provide much insight into her thoughts; she appears to make little impact save for making Bear feel braver. Like the other two characters, there are a number of concepts and perspectives that may be interpreted as embodied within this character, for example: (dis)empowerment; confidence/lack of confidence; (in)dependence; team member as opposed to team leader; conforming to expectations (social, cultural, gender-based).

However, this character can also be seen to provide an introduction to nature in that many people's first contact with the natural world is through a toy or a fictional character in a story. Natural places, such as woodland, are places that are

‘...perceived though a rich and complex mix of both good and fear-inducing myth and imagination’ (Bingley and Milligan 2004, p.48). This is a good point to pause on the path, and briefly explore another important concept embedded in this character: keeping it real.

In 1956, Rachel Carson urged parents to take their children outside as ‘A child’s world is fresh and new and beautiful... full of wonder and excitement’. She emphasized that, ‘Daily, intimate, sensory experience is essential to keep that wonder bright for a lifetime...’ (Ibid., pp.42-3); the early companionship of a responsive adult is the best way to make it happen. Her words have been echoed and added to over the years by many others including Richard Louv, and most recently by the National Trust, a UK based conservation charity. They emphasise that it is important children are encouraged to explore and discover a sense of wonder outside. And yet children can also inspire adults, enabling them to take a different perspective, to rediscover the world through their eyes. Adults just have to be able to get down to a child’s level, put down the mantle of sophistication and maturity, be responsive and remember how to play (Hayes, 2013b). The world looks, smells, feels, sounds and tastes different when using this approach: it’s more fun! The character of Bunny encourages readers to get down and squirm in the earth; to jump up in the air – to explore enthusiastically.

## **Boggarts**

What does this character represent? Boggarts are fictional characters that require imagination to bring to life and to interpret. To help explain, here is another short story, which was used to inform the character described here:

Stories have been told about a race of little people called Boggarts for at least a hundred and fifty years...some reports say they can be as small as fifty centimetres high while others say they are more than twice as tall. Because Boggarts are so small, people think they are weak but this is not so. Inside their small bodies there is a tremendous amount of special energy which allows them to perform tasks with such speed and accuracy that it has all the appearance of magic. They are not spiteful or dangerous and they never mean to hurt anyone deliberately; but they do have a great sense of fun which, sometimes, leads them into serious mischief and it is at these times that some people say they dislike them. However, all the reports say that Boggarts are always bright and cheerful and that they love singing and dancing (Mills, 2000).

This more traditional description of Boggarts is in sharp contrast to their more celebrated appearance in the Harry Potter novels, in which J.K. Rowling (1999, p.101) presents them as 'a shape-shifter...it can take the shape of whatever it thinks will frighten us most'. In this story, the Boggart represents the unexpected, a sense of mischievousness and perhaps an inability to understand/follow agreed rules – but it is not intended to be scary or frightening. Boggart in this story is purposively non-gendered, thus leaving it open to interpretation/imagination, allowing the story to be used in a range of contexts, to provoke discussions over different themes.

This character contributes an air of unpredictability to the story: it is not clear when or how Boggart is going to make an appearance or on what terms. When Boggart

appears, it is sudden and not welcomed by Bear: “Boo!” Boggart landed on the path in front of them, making them jump. “Whose turn is it to hide next?” Bear’s response to this is to walk off, without replying. Bunny is complicit in this decision, whilst Boggart is excluded. Boggart is left behind, it could be surmised, perplexed and bewildered by the turn of events: surely the aim of the game is to be successful at hiding? Isn’t that how the game of Hide and Seek is won?

There are a number of concepts and perspectives that may be interpreted as embodied within this character, for example inclusion/exclusion; lack of comprehension/awareness of rules – wanting to challenge and test rules; competitiveness – is Boggart prepared to ‘bend’ the rules in order to win the game? These are best explored by bringing the characters together within the story.

### **The story - playing together outside**

Considering the story as a whole, the three characters are clearly very different from each other: in fact, the reader may question whether it is likely that such diverse personalities would ever choose to play a game together. However, everyday situations like this do occur: groups of children and young people are brought together – sometimes through a school-based intervention; sometimes because a family member has decided it would be good for them to do something positive outside of school (for example, scouts, guides, youth group). Alternatively, it may be through a specific targeted intervention, for example, because they have all spent time being looked after by statutory authorities; or because they have been identified as having some kind of social, emotional or behavioural support need. If the last option is adopted as the basis for interpreting the story, it is possible to play with the idea that Bear is suffering some form of mental ill health

such as anxiety (which could explain his apparent discomfort at being alone in the dark); Bunny could be lacking in self-confidence, demonstrated by inability to express her own opinions (where is her voice in this story?) and Boggart could have a developmental disability such as autism ‘...that affects how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them’ (The National Autistic Society, 2014).

Moving on to consider the characters’ interactions within the story and the themes/concepts embedded and emerging from it, as identified earlier there are some complex issues to be explored that have emerged from this rather simple story. Indeed, it is the simplicity of the story that allows a plurality of interpretations and multiplicity of potential meanings. This section will explore some of these in more detail and will make some links to practice in working with children and young people outside, and specifically to the core concepts of youth work: equity, diversity and inclusion; participation and active involvement; partnership with young people and others; and personal, social and political development. It will consider the importance of emotions within outdoor learning; however, the reader is also encouraged to consider their own interpretations of the story and to consider its potential application within their own practice.

### **Emotions and Relatedness**

Outdoor educators need to allow sufficient space and time for people to be in nature, not just to do things in or to nature, in a way that is meaningful and relevant for them and enables them to reflect on their experiences and to make sense of them (Hayes, 2014). This sense-making draws on emotional responses – to the environment, to people and to activities. Emotions shape our understanding of self,

culture and actions: they are inter-subjective, sociable and relational. In everyday language, emotions may be referred to as 'feelings', and self-reported as 'I feel'. Emotions (feelings) come from within, they belong to us, and represent 'our experiences of, and responses to, the natural and social world' (Wentworth and Yardley, 1994, in Theodosius, 2012, p.63). They can be thought of as a strong, instinctive feeling, with a role in controlling thoughts (reasoning) and behaviour. Within this chapter, the focus is on what 'ordinary people' refer to as emotions, making use of everyday language rather than that used by specialists in the study of emotions (Baumeister et al., 2010 in Agnew et al., 2010).

Emotions are conscious feeling states, highly differentiated and normally experienced one at a time, involving a bodily response, such as physiological arousal. The same arousal may be experienced differently by people, depending on the cognitive label they attach to it. This is illustrated by the way the three characters respond differently to the game of Hide and Seek in the wood. Emotional states tend to develop and dissipate slowly, in contrast to the more fleeting, automatic affect, which can be subtle and possibly unconscious. Affective reactions can come (and go) within a fraction of a second. There are various terms used to represent the different conscious emotions, for example: joy, fear, anger, surprise, and wonder. These states tend to be slow to arise and to dissipate. There are many emotions implicit within this story: Bear feels anxious; scared; brave; grumpy. Bunny feels playful; happy; enthusiastic. Boggart's emotions are not so easy to discern: they could be mischievous, competitive, excited, thrilled or defiant – it is much more open to interpretation and thus to debate.

Within this discussion, it is important to consider automatic affective reactions: these may initially be created by emotions, and the affective memories and associations can have an effect on future actions. People learn to choose their behaviour according to the emotion they expect (want) to feel. For example, when feeling sad, there can be a corresponding behavioural response that seeks to make oneself feel better: a more positive emotion is the goal, rather than a change in behaviour. This is where reflection can be of use: reflecting on actions can enable an individual to 'extract a relevant lesson or moral for the future, and change their behaviour on subsequent occasions' (Baumeister et al., op. cit., p.129). Research also suggests that emotions can be beneficial to learning: information with emotional impact is arguably better remembered than other, less emotional information. Also, emotional states may help to improve attention, so that the individual identifies with, and concentrates on, the most relevant aspects of an event. Again, relating this back to the game, if the characters take time to reflect on the events and to discuss them with each other, the relevant aspects identified (for example, misunderstanding, feeling afraid of the dark) will differ from those first established (Bear's annoyance; Boggart's confusion).

The implication for this is that educators and facilitators of learning need to consider the emotional impact of their teaching, particularly when delivering outdoor learning with the aim of strengthening connections to nature. Put simply, emotions matter. One of the biggest, arguably most debated issues regarding emotions is how to measure them? What is measured, how and why? Many empirical studies make use of self-reported scaling exercises, often using a Likert

scale: 'Responses to rating scales are easily collated, easily coded, and easily analysed, allowing researchers to get on with Studies 2 and 3 (and 4...) ...' (Agnew et al., op. cit., p.6). This is an approach used in many studies into young people's connections with nature, for example RSPB's *Get Outdoors* Campaign (RSPB, 2013). This organisation has an online survey which asks 16 questions with five answers for respondents to choose from. Is this emphasis on 'measurement', on the need to quantify emotions, driven by the apparent preferences of journals for multiple empirical studies and replicable research, over more theoretical and philosophical research? Or a reflection of the efficiency of self-reported scaling assessments and questionnaires in comparison to more labour-intensive demands of other forms of research such as observation and interviewing?

In a critique of the preponderance of self-reports within psychology, Baumeister et al. (op. cit., p.15) highlight this issue stating: 'So that is behaviour today...Ratings and more ratings. Occasionally making a choice. Reading and taking a test.' Some forms of self-reporting can be more useful for exploring issues, for example narrative stories and semi/unstructured interviews which allow more opportunity for participants to use their own words to identify their feelings, without the need to measure or rank their answers. A relational approach to emotions is more concerned with the interface between self and social structure; overlapping emotions in a milieu; what emotions do, rather than what they are; using sociological theory to guide analysis; investigating emotions in situ as they occur during sequences of interaction (Walby et al., 2012).



## **Equity, diversity and inclusion**

The one size fits all, off-the shelf packages approach to outdoor learning, as espoused by the need for challenge and risk, for 'stepping outside of your comfort zone', does not always work: for some people, it may work for some of the time, in some contexts; for others, it may create anxiety, distress and discomfort, when it would be more beneficial to enable them to enjoy space, peace of mind and comfort. Whenever satisfaction of expectations is achieved, anxiety dissolves, generating a feeling of being in a comfort zone – safe, complete, free from risks and in peace with ourselves (Zacharias, 2012, p.1). This can be a strong position to work from, as a learner and as a facilitator of learning in others. This story can be seen to challenge the 'urban myth' in outdoor education that encourages people to move outside their comfort zone, to stretch themselves, as a way to achieve effective learning.

What is actually meant by the term 'comfort zone'? Is this a model or a metaphor? This is a highly contested and debated matter, much of which falls outside the scope of this chapter; here it is taken to represent a model often used within adventure and outdoor education literature as the basis for personal growth and transformation (Brown, 2008). However, as Davis-Berman and Berman (2002 in Brown *Ibid.*, p.11) argue: '...the greatest amount of change comes when participants feel safe, secure and accepted.' This is of utmost importance when working with young people who are experiencing some form of social exclusion, and whose everyday lives may already be full of stress and challenge. This is often recognised in work with infants and young children; why does life become so much more serious

for older children and young people? In westernised countries, people are defined/categorized on the basis of the age of their physical bodies (Valentine et al., 1998, p.2) with inherent societal and cultural expectations of age-appropriate behaviour. Around about the age of 11-13 (coinciding with puberty for most young people) the focus shifts from playful stories, and environmental awareness, to citizenship and environmental stewardship: young people are encouraged to become more responsible. Does this lie behind the apparent disconnection that young people may have with nature? Is it more a case of being disenchanted with nature, and over-burdened with its problems, than of being disconnected? Are young people opting to disconnect as a way of protecting themselves at a time in their lives when they face so many other challenges and changes?

The inherent dualistic nature of contemplative (gentle, safe) and adventurous (risky, scary) experiences makes it a challenge for facilitators to do both. Whilst some would argue that there is space and time at the top of a mountain, after the climb has been achieved, to contemplate and reflect, there will always be others who prefer to contemplate and reflect as they go, and are perfectly happy not to reach the top of the mountain. 'Does success in including one group come at the expense of excluding another?' (Labonte, 2004, p.119). This is a valid and important question. Brown (2008, p.11) suggests:

'Let us provide students with favourable conditions for authentic and meaningful experiences where they are challenged in an appropriate manner and suitably supported by those with a genuine interest in their learning...'.

Taking their argument a step further, it can be argued that facilitators need to enable young people to feel comfortable outdoors, to feel a sense of belonging. Facilitators should remember the power of curiosity, awe, wonder and imagination in stimulating the senses, to allow space for curiosity, undirected attention, and natural inspiration. There is a growing awareness of the need for enchantment and for increased attention to ‘...reenchantment—the phenomena of sensory, emotional, and non-rational ways of connecting with the earth’s living systems’ (Barlett, 2008, p.1077). This awareness is reflected in a worldwide movement towards more playful activities outside for all ages, not just for those of pre-school and primary age (for example, Richard Louv, 2013; Children and Nature Network, 2014). These are concepts embodied within Bunny, who is clearly still enchanted with, and by the natural world: in many ways, she is an enchanting character!

This is a viewpoint increasingly being recognized by others in the field of outdoor education (for example Nicol, 2013) and the wider world of education. At this point it should be acknowledged that the language used to structure and categorise this work is problematic: who gets to define outdoor and adventure education? Is it outdoor education or education outdoors? Education or learning? And what is meant by outdoors anyway? (Zink and Burrows, 2008). In this chapter adventure is defined as experiences that are unusual and exciting, may sometimes be daring, at a level appropriate and relevant to the individual. This definition recognises that for some people an adventure in their back garden can be as effective a learning experience as climbing a mountain. This differentiation is arguably also the central tenet of social inclusion.

## **Participation and active involvement**

There are many potential barriers to participation, some political, some social, some cultural, the focus here is on when doing gets in the way of being in nature:

‘In significant ways, students’ experiential contact with the natural world is being curtailed and shaped...when they are “allowed” outside, their contact is structured, prescribed and limited...the kind of inductive learning that arises from relatively unstructured, outdoor activity is increasingly marginalized’ (Roberts, 2012, p.99).

Sometimes people are so busy doing things, learning new skills, undertaking high risk activities that there is not sufficient time allocated for just being there. Outdoor learning practitioners may be afraid of inactivity, of allowing participants to become bored, fearing (often with good cause) that it will lead to misbehaviour (as demonstrated by Boggart perhaps?) or worse, dangerous behaviour. Is their challenging behaviour actually a coping mechanism, a form of communication? Are educators actively listening to them? And if they are, how are they acting on what they hear? How do they respond to challenge? It is important to take account of values and beliefs: these influence what and how educators teach, they influence what form of knowledge is selected, how it is organised and subsequently delivered to other people. As an example, the author of this chapter became a practitioner in outdoor settings because she likes being outdoors, she is more comfortable in a wood than in a classroom, and she chooses to make use of stories because she likes stories: however, she must not assume that others feel the same.

The conversational path meanders on to explore the relationship between exclusion, participation, and under-representation, by defining the terms in order to apply them to social inclusion:

- Participation measures observed behaviour - it is the percentage of all people doing a certain activity who belong to a specific group.
- Representation is a meta-statistic - it is the ratio of 'the participation of a specific group in a certain activity' to 'the proportion of that group in the background population as a whole'.
- Exclusion expresses how people feel (their perceptions) (OPENspace, 2008).

Participation and representation can be quantified using data from statistical surveys, however exclusion cannot automatically be inferred from under-representation; a group that is identified as under-represented may not feel excluded, if it has full access to opportunities to participate, but still declines (chooses to opt out). It is the concept of exclusion that is particularly interesting, as it is based on perception, it is subjective and individual – it is personal. It is not possible to ascertain from the story if Boggart feels excluded by the actions of Bear and Bunny, however it is a possibility to consider.

### **Partnership with young people and others/Personal, social and political development**

These two core concepts of youth work are in many ways, interwoven and inseparable. Youth work represents a partnership with young people, their families and their communities. It is based on the principle of voluntary engagement and recognises that young people are not isolated individuals: they are part of much wider familial, social and cultural networks. As an outdoor educator, attempting to

satisfy the demands of such diverse participants, to be socially inclusive and mindful of diversity can prove to be a challenge too far. When the work involves very diverse groups, for example, family groups including five-year olds and 50-year olds, some with disabilities, is it possible to create programs which are truly accessible to all? Perhaps, if the educator works in a way that is responsive to individuals, is needs-led and tailored to the specific needs of the specific participants. However, this means that all involved need to sign up to shared aims and objectives, which is not always possible in practice – as demonstrated by Boggart in the game of Hide and Seek.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has adopted a playful approach to the topic of outdoor learning making use of a simple, fictional story, however, there is a serious side to this. When nature, culture and family are experienced as an interwoven entity, the connections and attachments made can be very strong and meaningful: these are connections made with each other and with nature. Starting with soft toys, fairy tales and nursery rhymes, the world of nature can begin to be explored with children, introducing them to some of the creatures with whom they live, and helping them to feel a sense of familiarity and desire to learn more. As they grow and develop, there are progressively more opportunities to make this real, to take them outside and let them play – and it can be so much more fun if teddy (or rabbit) comes too! Perhaps children who know how to play in nature, and who value these experiences, will be more likely to grow up keen and able to play with their own children in a similar way (for discussion on memories of childhood experiences and impact on adult behaviour, see Chawla, 1990; Waite, 2007). But what happens to

those less fortunate? Those who find themselves surrounded by adults who are 'grown-ups', who are not responsive; people who have forgotten (or perhaps never knew) how to play? What about those who live separately from their families, or whose families are overwhelmed by dealing with more pressing concerns? Does early disconnection result in lifelong disconnection from nature? Does this in turn impact on socio and political decisions about nature? What happens to the young people who enter adulthood never having experienced nature in this way? Who helps them to discover the wonder and then keep it bright (Carson, 1956)? These questions are all potential areas of research for geographers of children, youth and families.

There may be an answer to the last question: practitioners, facilitators, teachers, grandparents, carers and peers; they can all do their bit to help by providing outdoor experiences, in diverse guises. However, is this enough? Is it possible to remember to be childlike (perhaps even childish?) in amongst dealing with the requirements for professionalism and responsibility to ensure everyone stays safe, that desired outcomes are met and learning can be evidenced/measured? How can opportunities like this be provided for young people for whom such activities may appear to have little relevance, and who may cynically perceive them as too childish, after all, they're nearly adults? One way found to be effective by the author, has been through intergenerational work: helping to set up a teddy-bear hunt for younger siblings can be great fun for teenagers, result in more creatively hidden bears and thus a more interesting experience for younger ones. Then afterwards, it is an experience that can be relived through sharing stories, each with

their own perspective as hider or discoverer of the bears. Stories serve as a connection, linking experiences through the time and space that separates them: stories (and cuddly toy animals) can help people to understand and to enjoy time spent in nature.

Utilising stories can help to develop a sense of belonging, of familiarity, comfort - to engage, captivate, and encourage participation. Stories enable people to make use of their imagination and reflections, and they can linger in the memory long after the experience, helping to make the link from the outer world to the inner world, and can be adapted to the specific context and culture. This approach can be used with people of all ages – from small children to adults; however, there is less time to do this with toys! A favourite toy from early childhood makes a good companion for those initial adventures: someone to share the stories with, to hang on to when feeling scared, and to cuddle when tired and sleepy. Unfortunately, for most (author excludes herself from this) a cuddly rabbit is usually outgrown well before adolescence, consigned to a dusty shelf or tucked away in a cardboard box at the back of a cupboard. However, a chance discovery whilst looking for something else (a pair of walking boots perhaps?) can unlock the memories, allowing the discoverer to relive the experience and remember the wonder of nature – to renew the connections.

### **Final words – continuing the conversation...**

A playful challenge from Bunny Rabbit to the readers of this chapter: “My questions for you: within your own life, do you make time and space for play? Are you a good



role model? By allowing others to see you play, you may inspire them to do the same. If you are a facilitator of outdoor learning experiences, do you encourage your participants to make use of their imaginations? Finally, do you share your stories, and listen when others tell you theirs?”

Boggart, Bear and Bunny Rabbit would really like to hear from readers of this chapter with answers to these questions; they can be contacted via the author, who would also love to continue the conversation.

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## Chapter 9: Kindness

This chapter includes a paper published in the form of a book chapter within an edited book about young people and care.<sup>92</sup> The empirical data which informed this paper was elicited near the middle of my primary research, and it brings together many of the themes identified by my other papers and applies them to a specific moment from my primary research, to explore a young person's relationship to nature. It highlights that we cannot expect young people to feel connected to something they have not yet experienced, or have experienced only in a negative way. It also emphasises the role of companions/facilitators, and the interconnectivity of nature, culture and family - an interwoven entity.

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### **Article title: Kindness: caring for self, others and nature - who *cares* and *why*?**

#### **Abstract**

This chapter will make use of a friendly, narrative style that invites participation from the reader, to explore caring for self, others and nature, as encapsulated in the notion of kindness. It begins with a fable, a short story that serves a moral purpose, which is based on my empirical research with 'looked after' young people. This fable shares the experience of one young male, centrally placing him within the discussion, and it is utilised in stages to explore the concept of care. It adopts an interdisciplinary, contextual approach to literature, drawing from geography, environment and nature; youth work; experiential, outdoor and adventure education; child/adolescent development and play; storytelling and creative writing; philosophy and psychology. The fable is based on one of many 'magic moments' that I have experienced as I have explored young people's relationship with nature. The chapter argues that we need to be able to pause, reflect and extract meaning from these specific moments. In this fable, we

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<sup>92</sup> Hayes, T.A. (2017) 'Kindness: caring for self, others and nature - who cares and why?', in Horton, J. and Pyer, M. (eds) *Children, young people and care*. London: Taylor Francis.

can see that care is relational, situational and complex; it includes intrinsic elements of human development. Fables, a form of creative nonfiction, are an evocative and moral way of conveying the learning from these moments. The chapter ends with an invitation to the reader to pause and consider what care means to them.

**Key words:** Caring; care; kindness; interdisciplinary; young people; creative nonfiction; story; relational.

## **Introduction**

Kindness is a behaviour defined by ethical characteristics including a pleasant disposition, care and concern for others, and is demonstrated by acting in a friendly, helpful, considerate manner (Oxford Essential English Dictionary (OED), 2011). In some cultures, it is known as a virtue, and in others as a value; I see it as a moral stance. We can be kind to ourselves, to others and towards nature. I will now be kind to you, the reader by explaining my approach to this chapter, which adopts a friendly, narrative style to explore caring for self, others and nature. It is informed by both social and natural science and presents a philosophical, conceptual and empirical discussion. Like many concepts, for example sense of place, care is defined, conceptualised, theorised and applied ‘...across different disciplines in different ways’ (Convery et al., 2012, p.1). Consequently, I have adopted an interdisciplinary approach, which I will explain in more detail later. My language is deliberately evocative, provocative and multi-faceted; it is ‘...scholarship [that] reaches toward an audience, it cares. It wants to make a difference...’ (Pelias, 2004, p.12). It is written in response to calls for more ‘...diverse, challenging, exciting, creative, and interdisciplinary work’ (Kraftl et al., 2014). Like many researchers exploring the slippery stuff of the social world (for example, Macartney, 2007; Wood, 2007; Jones, 2000/2008) I often feel constrained within traditional forms of

both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Consequently, this chapter takes a boundary-crossing (Ellis, 2004) integrated, yet fully-contextual approach to both empirical research and to literature, drawing from the wells of geography, environment and nature; youthwork; experiential, outdoor and adventure education; child/adolescent development and play; storytelling and creative writing; philosophy and psychology.

The chapter begins with a fable, a short story that serves a moral purpose, inviting moral contemplation, but not judgement; they are based on my empirical research with 'looked after' young people. This fable is then utilised in stages to explore the concept of care, before finally being placed within a wider context that invites the reader to also question what we mean when we use the word care. The story is one of many magic moments that I have experienced as I have explored young people's relationship with nature. I am exploring how young people make sense of outdoor experiences that have been provided for them as part of a targeted, specifically funded intervention. I am curious as to how these experiences impact on their perception of their own health and well-being, and on their desire to look after (to care-for) outdoor spaces, which in everyday terms we call nature.

My research is interdisciplinary, in that I have made use of an integrated blend of disciplines from the outset (Kessel et al., 2009); this is not surprising in view of my earlier training, first as a natural scientist, then as a social scientist. This particular piece of research has arisen from my previous practice as an environmental youth worker, and aims to discover what it is that we need to do to make sure our work is effective – so that young people and practitioners find value and meaning in their

experiences, and there is an increased awareness of the need to conserve our natural environment.

My research has involved spending time with young people and practitioners participating in a number of different projects, across a range of settings: urban, rural and coastal; from the south-east to the north-west of England. All of the young people were aged between 11 and 21, and had been identified as having specific needs that would benefit from a targeted intervention, with pre-determined outcomes. This included young people with special educational needs / disabilities (SEN/D); young people classed as NEET (not in employment, education or training); young people following an alternative curriculum, both within statutory education (schools and colleges) and in alternative, community-based education; young people attending community-based youth clubs, and visiting residential outdoor centres; young parents; young people in care/preparing to leave statutory care. As I write this chapter, I reflect on the young people who have participated in the projects that have been included in my research; although they are far from a homogenous group, indeed, they are a wonderfully diverse and eclectic group of young people, what they share is the experience of exclusion, of being marginalised from the mainstream world. As a result of this, many of them have experienced considerable unkindness and a lack of care: I have no wish to inadvertently repeat that in the way that I interpret and write about my research, which again reiterates the need to take an interdisciplinary approach to gain a more holistic understanding.



My findings have highlighted a need for playful, creative and emotional approaches that allow young people to feel comfortable *being* in nature, rather than always *doing* things to, in and for nature. The natural world can be perceived to be a magical and enchanting place for children; indeed, many of the activities we offer as practitioners actively encourage this as they are based on imaginative play. However, as children grow older and develop an awareness of the state of the natural world, they begin to understand the urgency of the need to protect it, and as a consequence, the 'magic' often disappears to be replaced by more serious considerations and concern. In my approach to addressing this, I have been inspired by writers such as Rachel Carson (1962/2000), to create fables designed to stimulate interdisciplinary dialogue in an engaging and understandable way. This has also necessitated challenging more traditional forms of research and writing, by embracing more 'stylish' approaches (Sword, 2012), primarily by making my work accessible through avoiding technical jargon or overly academic language, and maintaining my focus on practical applications and everyday language.

The moments used for my fables are ones that I have perceived as epiphanies, turning-points or an address (Moules et al., 2014). They have proved to be the defining moments that have made me stop, wonder and question in an attempt to extract meaning (Denzin, 2014). They are the times when I have felt bothered by something, have become 'troubled' (Meyer and Land, 2003). When this happens, I take care to critically analyse each specific moment, to carefully avoid it being merely 'a nice story'; it is so much more than that. It is an opportunity to '...illustrate facets of cultural experience...make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders

and outsiders' (Ellis et al., 2011, p.3). Like most of my magic moments, there was nothing momentous, or out-of-the-ordinary about this particular experience, indeed it was arguably, its very ordinariness (Ross et al., 2009), its routineness (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011), its everydayness (Horton and Kraftl, 2006) that made it so special. It occurred in the early stages of my empirical research, and it is one that has sustained and nurtured me throughout. I offer it to you here and now in story form and invite you to slow down your mind and let my words sink beneath your skin (Hustedde and King, 2002) so that you may also reflect on the meanings of this story, and consider how to relate this approach to exploring your own experiences. This particular story is dedicated to Liz, the pseudonym chosen by the young man at the centre of the story, and utilised to address moral and ethical dimensions of empirical research. I will tell you more about him (and that) later, but for now, let me share his (our) story.

"But Tracy, I don't get it. I hear Londoners who come here on holiday, I see them looking at everything, I hear them say "wow! Look at that mountain, that lake, wow!" But I just don't get it. I don't see it - I think it's cos I grew up here, it's just normal, nothing special. I don't say wow..."

His voice tails off as his thoughts drift to another place. "*I do,*" I reply, "*I live here and I still say wow – nature is so wonderful. What do you think it would take for you to say wow?*" Looking at me sadly, shaking his head, he responds, "*Nothing, I just don't get it. I don't feel the 'wow thing'. It's just outside. I do that all the time, I like being inside...*"

Our conversation moves on through a discussion of some of the things planned for this residential weekend: a combination of two types of activities. First, being trained by me to be a peer mentor to support other young people who are in statutory care, preparing to leave or who have just

made the move to independent living. Secondly, to participate in a number of adventurous outdoor activities, facilitated by colleagues. Discussion widens to include the other young people sitting in the back of the mini-bus alongside us, with topics ranging across music, film and sport. We arrive at the centre and settle into our designated spaces: separate rooms for boys and girls, with leaders in between. Dinner is served, eaten and the table cleared, then we head out for an evening walk. Each participant has been equipped with walking boots, waterproofs and head-torches. It has been raining and the ground is sodden and heavy underfoot. Feet in badly fitting boots, slip, trip and stumble, accompanied by squeals and laughter. Two of the young men offer me their arms, jokily giving support to the 'old mother' of the group...

We stop part way up the fell. Each person is placed by my colleague in their own special spot, to experience the quiet of the fell on their own. The more nervous ones are reassured that we are nearby. Then we wait. After a while, ten minutes or so, we gather them up and make our way back down the fell, to a space where we can reflect on the activity and share our experiences. And then it happens, the word escapes his lips *"Wow! What's that?"* He is pointing to the top of the fell, to where a gentle light is appearing. *"That's the moon,"* my colleague explains, *"The moon is rising behind the fell and casting its light across the top. If we wait a bit, we'll see the moon."* We wait and watch, then again, I hear it, softly as if forming part of an involuntary breath: *"wowwww"*. Quietly, we return to the centre. Talking later about the experience I gently ask him, *"Do you know what you said, up there on the fell?"*

He doesn't, he is unaware...

The ellipsis points at the end of four sentences within this story signify places at which to pause and focus the conversation; this approach conceptualises place as somewhere to stop, rest and become involved (Tuan cited in Cresswell, 2015).

There are other places I could have chosen (for example, home making/breaking; silence; gender/sexuality) and I encourage you to consider which you would have chosen if I had not made this choice for you, if I had left you alone to interpret the story in your own way. Instead, I facilitate the exploratory process by asking specific questions, a process which culminates in addressing the story's final thought. In doing this, I am embracing the trend for '...conceptual approaches to closely align with the nature of changing bodies of knowledge in a fluid social world ... conceptual understandings are better understood as transition points rather than endpoints' (Milligan and Wood, 2009, p.2). In the hermeneutic tradition of 'questionableness' (Nixon, 2014), the chapter will end, not with conclusions, but with more questions to encourage further contemplation. I make no apology for this: the world is full of messiness (Huestedde and King, 2002; Jones, 2008) and does not fit within 'neat' conclusions; I believe it is morally wrong to pretend otherwise.

A brief introduction to Liz before we explore the story: at our time of first meeting, he was 17 years old and had been in statutory care since the age of six. We met through my role as a researcher responsible for evaluating a Cumbria-wide service for young people who were identified as being in care, or having just left care. The service had the espoused aim of easing their transition to independent adult life; occurring during the phase of life that sees a shift in focus away from being in care and towards caring for self. This transition is something acknowledged as being of international concern, resulting in disrupted education and poor social outcomes (Rogers, 2011). He informs me that he has several siblings, most of which he does

not see, or have contact with. I do not pry, or seek background information from colleagues; as a professional youth worker, I prefer to get to know him on his terms, learning about him as and when he is ready. However, I have met one sister, who also engages with the project where I am based. I do not know her so well; she is more reluctant than him to join in with activities. He is a gentle person, openly conflicted about his sexuality, and very unsure about his future; he is conscious that his time in care is coming to an end, and that he is moving towards independence and a less supervised kind of life. Unlike many 17-year olds who look forward to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday with great anticipation, he views it with trepidation as it will mean that his visits with his mother will no longer be supervised. He shares that he is not ready to face this alone; action by his social worker ensures that this is delayed until he is ready. I enjoy his company, he has a well-rounded sense of humour, and a seemingly never-ending bank of funny train stories to share with me: things he has seen or heard or experienced whilst travelling. When he found out about my research project, he was determined to be included and was one of the first young people I interviewed; part of that research conversation is presented within this story. In the mini-bus, on the way to the residential, we had talked about what I was doing, with him asking me lots of questions about the why (purpose) and how (methodology), which had prompted his first remarks.

### **I don't say wow...**

Wow, a universally recognised word uttered as an exclamation of astonishment, admiration, awe, wonder or joy. Liz, in the moment, on the bus, does not feel any of this, more a sense of bewilderment, and I perceive a feeling of loss, of sadness. This small three-letter word represents the effect of these emotions, as explained by

Fuller (2006) they excite our imaginations, enhance ‘...our capacity to seek deeper patterns in the universe’ (Ibid., p.2) and provoke reflection and contemplation. When we encounter something that we perceive to be new or very different, it surprises us, it causes us to wonder. Descartes (trans. Voss, 1989) identified that this happens before we know whether this object/thing will be of any use to us: it is a spontaneous and intuitive response to something different, something wonderful. Focusing on wonder as a way of exploring this, Fuller explains that wonder is a form of heightened interest, which ‘...momentarily suspends habitual ways of looking at the world and instead lures people into new and creative engagement with their surroundings... wonder induces receptivity and openness. It prompts us to become more connected with the wider environment’ (Fuller 2006, p.12). Liz currently lives in what most people consider to be one of the most beautiful parts of the UK, and yet he does not appear to notice or appreciate this. It is generally accepted that early experiences in nature are important for developing an awareness of, and a connection to nature (see, for example: Chawla, 1990; Waite, 2007; Dunlap and Kellert 2012). This is nothing new: in 1956, Rachel Carson encouraged parents and carers to take children outside, highlighting that ‘A child’s world is fresh and new and beautiful... full of wonder and excitement [...] Daily, intimate, sensory experience is essential to keep that wonder bright for a lifetime...’ (Carson, 1956, pp.42-3). The most effective way for this to happen is through companionship with a responsive adult, however what happens to the young people who enter adulthood never having experienced nature in this way? Who helps them to discover the wonder and then keep it bright (Carson, 1956)? I have written elsewhere about the importance of playfulness in addressing this, (Hayes,

2015a/2013) however it takes more than a playful approach: it takes kindness and care.

Retracing our steps to the start of this section of the story, Liz's choice of wording to describe those who do say wow as 'Londoners' is interesting. In this one term, he encapsulates an extreme sense of 'otherness': London is a very long way from the west coast of Cumbria where Liz spends much of his time. Applying a number of geographical concepts: as a place, it is spatially, temporally and culturally distant and different, and the people who come from there are different to Liz: there are '...vast distances in knowledges, needs, modes of being and experiences' (Jones, 2008, p.200). If we chose to apply socio-cultural concepts, we could consider the added dimension of how 'Londoners' are perceived as different: more affluent, mobile, professional – visitors coming to gaze in wonder at the landscape, or second-home owners who make living unaffordable for many or adventurous types keen on ticking off yet another mountainous peak. However, those are complex topics and issues to savour and explore elsewhere. Here it is sufficient to say that Liz sees them as 'other', as unrepresentative of him and his life: they are distinctly different.

Unlike Liz, I did not grow up in Cumbria; in my early adulthood, I lived and worked near London, and two of my grown-up children currently live there. Cumbria is a place where I have chosen to live, moving to make a permanent home after many years of holidaying here. I feel a kinship with the 'Londoners' who say "wow": at the time of the encounter I had been resident here for less than a year, and even now I

am still regularly surprised by what I see around me. Liz has not yet had the chance to choose his home: he started life within a family home which was abruptly disrupted and disturbed when the children were removed from the care of their parents. Separated from parents, and siblings, he was placed elsewhere, in homes and with people that were chosen for him. Within a later conversation he confides, *"I remember being taken into care. No one told me anything except, 'you have three minutes to pack'."* Conscious of how long it took me to carefully pack the numerous boxes that I filled with my treasured belongings (particularly books, teddy bears and toys from my childhood, and my children's), and paid to have safely transported north to Cumbria to enable me to meaningfully set up my new home, I am shocked at how little he would have been able to take with him. Three minutes? This was all the time he was given to gather his belongings before being taken away in a police car to a 'family' he did not know. I am deeply troubled by this, and find myself wondering what would I grab if that was all the time I was given? Not having lived his experience, I am unable to find a specific answer to this question, yet my emotional response allows me to imagine what it may have been like and to empathise. Responding to his words, his story, I feel a sense of loss and sadness – interwoven with gratitude for having the luxury of time to pack. I share this with you to further your understanding of the context for this story and to enable you to test out your personal response to it (Smith and Smith, 2008).

Liz was given a social worker, although he did not know what one was, who informed him "You will now be in care until you're 18 years old". That did not mean anything to him either, he was too young to understand. This marked the beginning



of his life in care: being placed in a new house, away from people he knew, with few belongings, little comfort or sense of belonging. No wonder he does not say “wow” when he steps outside. He does not see the inauthentic, romanticised, rural idyll (see, for example Jones, 2000; Jones, 2008; Valentine, 2001) that we (as in me and the ‘Londoners’) do. His view is very different to ours; whilst we are gazing in awe at a landscape that has been commodified for our pleasure and leisure (Valentine, 2003), he is looking at a much rawer, gritty and disturbing space, where bad, unkind things happen to children like him.

**It’s just outside. I do that all the time, I like being inside...**

Outside/inside; insider/outsider are terms that invite us to explore through metaphorical, philosophical and geographical concepts (see for example, Bachelard, 1958/1994). Here we are going to accept the everyday usage of Liz. Like many people (young and old) Liz spends much of his time indoors, either in his foster home, on the train or at college; he also volunteers at a local charity shop; you could say that his life is full of indoor learning. There are numerous studies, theoretical and empirical that highlight our concerns about how little time westernised children and young people spend outside (see for example: Louv, 2005; White and Stoecklin, 2008; Ridgers et al., 2012). As explained in detail by Palmer (2006), this is one element of what is seen by many as an alarming deterioration in children/young people’s understanding and appreciation of the world they live in. In her book, she urges us (people who facilitate learning, whatever our defined role may be) to enable children and young people to play outside more. This viewpoint is substantiated by research; for example, in 2012 Sigman reported some alarming statistics which highlighted that by the age of seven, the average westernised child

will have spent the equivalent of one whole year of 24 hour-days watching screen media; by 18, Liz's age, this increases to the equivalent of three years' worth (Sigman, 2012, pp.8-9). Having spent time with him, he does not appear to conform to this; he has an old-style phone, which, unlike others within the group, tends to stay out of sight (perhaps he may be embarrassed by it?), however he demonstrably enjoys spending time with people, engaging in conversation and eye-contact. He actively seeks out opportunities to participate in activities – both indoors and outdoors.

In the mini-bus he was quick to inform me that he liked being indoors, but in a later reflective conversation, he contradicts this, telling me that young people “... *think they're a lot safer indoors, in their own surroundings. But actually you're a lot safer outside*”. Is this a result of the training we have provided as part of the peer-mentoring programme? He has learned about the need for risk assessments, professional boundaries, and appropriate behaviour. He has a greater awareness of what we, as facilitators of the experiences, actually do and an insight into why we do this the way we do. This appears to have altered his perception - although perhaps it may be because he knows me better, feels able to share more sensitive memories and thoughts. As an adult, I am unable to confidently explain this, so I choose to accept it as it is, with all its messiness in relation to my empirical research. In this moment of speaking with me, Liz appears to feel safe, which is what matters most to me.

### **Jokily offering support to the 'old mother' of the group...**

In this moment, I have to ask myself exactly who is supporting whom? Looking back on the experience as I write this chapter, I remember the feeling of wet mud, clinging to my boots, sucking them under and causing me to wobble; the firm grasp of hands, appearing on either side gripping my arms to keep me upright; the shrieks as one of my helping hands (standing to the left of me) slips in his badly fitting, borrowed boots, nearly taking me with him. This is quickly followed by laughter and reassuring words, *"You're safe Tracy, I won't let you fall."* I recall looking up at the earnest young face to my right, it is Liz, and I recognise that his slight build is highly unlikely to hold me (and my much more considerable weight), should I fully lose my footing. We pause, then linking arms, three of us slowly move forward together, more stabilised than when we were walking alone. Ahead we can just about make out the shapes of others in the group: the experienced outdoor leader and other young people. They do not appear to be struggling as much as us, striding confidently out across the muddy field. Our physical closeness enables us to talk and our conversation is relaxed and humorous; we tell each other silly childish jokes and they refer to me as the old mother of the group. The following day, on their return from the activities they have undertaken with my colleague (I stayed behind to mark their coursework), they respond to me greeting them at the door with the remark *"Oh, look its Old Mother Hubbard."* I laugh as I move to switch on the kettle to make them a drink. Even now, several years on from the experience, I remember the warmth – both emotional and physical - between us and I realise that I miss their company; we have all moved on in very different ways. I wonder what they remember from the experience.

Rousing from my reveries, and returning to the story, an unintended consequence from losing my footing was the opportunity for them to show how much they cared about me, and in this instance, they cared-for me: we were moving towards being in a reciprocal, caring relation. Like Pyer (2008), in her study with young people who are wheelchair users, I am conscious of the potential we have as researchers to affect others. Is it fair to allow a caring relation to develop, when our time together is time-limited; particularly for those whose lives have involved many transient relationships? Would it be kinder (for them and for me) not to show this type of care? I agree with Pyer (Ibid., p.215), with regards to duty of care ‘...sometimes there are legacies that ethical researchers must endeavour to deal with’, which I am attempting to do through critical and theoretical reflections to identify the learning to take forward. Also, it is only with the benefit of hindsight that I realise the importance of humour and laughter within these experiences; like Macpherson (2008), this was not something I set out to explore, and yet the more I read and reflect on my magic moments, the more I listen and attend to voice recordings and transcripts of interviews, the more conscious I become of the *funniness* involved.

Considering my role, I am very adept at holding coats, taking photographs, and providing support for those who wish to be adventurous; in many ways, I would describe myself as adventurous, certainly in terms of my research and teaching, however this does not extend to risky physically strenuous activities. I prefer adventures that are slower, more gentle and inclusive (Hayes, 2014a) usually accompanied by my teddy bear (Hayes, 2015a) or bunny rabbit (Hayes, 2013b)! On this particular residential experience, I was happy to play the supporting role,

although also highly conscious that the aim of the project was to encourage independence. I felt a tension between two apparently binary positions: wanting to *care-for* these young people, who have experienced a lack of care in their lives; and caring *about* them, in a less involved, more professionally detached way, that acknowledged the restrictions inherent in our roles. Noddings (2013) clearly elucidates this distinction by describing caring-for as ‘...an encounter or set of encounters characterized by direct attention and response. It requires the establishment of a caring-relation, person-to-person contact...’ (Ibid., p.xiv). She asserts that it is impossible to care-for everyone, we do not have sufficient time or resources for this. The awareness of this distinction can help us to be more effective in our work. My colleagues are adept at caring about people, and they take great care to organise activities so that risk is managed in a way that allows for risky activities to be enjoyed; their role does not allow them to care-for the participants, they adopt a less emotional stance. I take care to avoid these activities; and yet I embrace the equally risky world of emotions, and prefer situations where I am able to care-for people. Self-awareness, including why we choose to do certain things and make particular career choices, is integral to working effectively.

As highlighted by Marschall (2014, p.518) within a study of children’s experiences following the divorce of their parents, the dominant discourses around care have developed from the normative perspective of the nuclear family, and ‘...draw on general and rather implicit assumptions of caring as a unidirectional, linear and causal process of caregiving from parents’. As we can see from the story in this chapter, and from Marschall’s own research, this is not really the case: care is not a

linear, one-way process, it is relational, situational and complex; it includes intrinsic elements of human development such as attention, love and kindness, as well as care. Attempting to address these needs is therefore not easy, it is so much more than just 'give and take'.

**He doesn't, he is unaware.**

Despite his earlier protestations, Liz says the word 'wow' twice. The first time in surprise and curiosity, directing our attention to what he has seen. The second as an almost involuntary breath, an instinctive, intuitive response to what he has encountered. It is nothing particularly exceptional or unexpected, however it is the first time that Liz has noticed it, has paid attention to it and wants to share it with us. He was transfixed by the moonlight – he could not see the moon as it had not risen high enough, however it cast its light and its shadow over the fells. He had spoken of wanting to stay on the fell and watch it until morning. But the clouds descended and the moon disappeared, the moment passed into memory. As identified by Sissay (2012), in general the "... great moments of childhood are recalled through family members"; my efforts to capture it within a fable can be seen as an attempt to make up for this absence. If we consider the role of the practitioner, as the facilitator, co-participant and interpreter of experiences, we have a privileged insider role that allows us to share these magic moments. I suggest we have a duty of care to ensure that we do this.

And yet as we recall those moments of childhood, we are looking back through time, through the eyes and awareness of an adult. As identified by Jones (2003, p.34) when doing this 'Our imagination needs to work with our memory and we

need to recall the feelings and emotions themselves, as far as is possible, as well as narrative accounts of events'. Does it matter if the memories that Liz shares with me may not be entirely, historically accurate? Does anyone care that his account may be contradicted by other family members, or people in positions of authority responsible for his care? Is this an important dimension of empirical research? Not to me, because I am interested in his perception of his experiences as shared by him.

Like health professionals (see for example, Bray et al., 2013) practitioners of outdoor experiences need the ability to show kindness and compassion through caring-for, in addition to more professional skills and knowledge. In Bray et al.'s study into the role of professional education in developing compassionate health practitioners, they identify compassion as a core value which represents '...responding with humanity and kindness to each person's pain, distress, anxiety or need [...] respecting and valuing people as individuals and responding to them in ways that appreciate the human experience ... (Ibid., 2013, p.481). Although their study focused on what we recognise as the health service (i.e. nursing) their findings are applicable to our more general well-being and to the role of other practitioners. Kindness encapsulates the relational reality of caring, its reciprocity, responsiveness, attentiveness and care.

### **Care, who cares, about what, why, when, where and how ...**

Retracing my steps once more to the title of the article, so many questions may be generated by one very small, taken-for-granted word: care is an everyday word, with an everyday meaning – or is it? Like much in life it all depends on how it is

applied (OEED, 2011): as a noun, it implies serious attention, thought, caution, protection, worry or anxiety; as a verb, it signifies concern, interest, affection, liking or willingness – for example, would you care to accompany me as we explore this word further? We can join it to other words, and become careless, careful, carefree, carer, caregiver, caretaker, careworn; we can care for, be cared for, care about, be cared about, come-in-to-care, be in care, prepare to leave care and become a care-leaver. This last role is a lifelong one: as highlighted by Lemn Sissay (2013) who states “I am a care-leaver for the rest of my life. It's not something I get over or avoid. It's who I am.” This one aspect, which is not of our own making, becomes embedded within our identity, a socially constructed part of who we perceive ourselves to be. At this point I am reminded by the words of Lorde (1984, pp.120-1), to take great care: when we are forced to focus on one part of ourselves, categorised (labelled?) by an ‘externally imposed definition’, this one part of our identity may be presented as ‘...the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self... this is a destructive and fragmenting way to live...’ We are so much more than that one part. We need to look beyond the traditional, hegemonically-derived roles of care-giver (parent / carer / practitioner) and cared-for (child / young person) by emphasising that this is a reciprocal process, involving practices that are actively negotiated and adjusted by both sides, across space and time. The balance may shift from ‘side to side’ depending on the specific situation and context, but each ‘side’ is of equal value in this process of caring, of recognising and attending to each other’s specific needs, demonstrating kindness. This is the relational reality, it is ‘inherently dynamic and interrelated at all levels’ (Spretnak, 2011, p.1).



To be *in care* means that you are no longer cared for within your own family, or by a family member, or even in your own home, you are in the care of your local authority, in statutory care, in that space that someone else calls home, and tells you to do the same when you are placed there. This is very different. In the UK, it has been reported (see for example, Rogers 2011) that the main reasons for children coming into care are abuse/neglect (60%) and 'significant family dysfunction', typically related to alcohol and/or drug abuse (10%). If we accept Noddings' argument that we learn to care through watching and modelling the caring practices of others, combined with opportunities to '...have supervised practice in caring' (2013, p.xviii) then it becomes even more important to consider our own practices. By allowing them to care-for us, we are supporting their development; this is not a sign of weakness on our part, but a very important lesson for life and part of a reciprocal caring relation. In Rogers' study, young people '...described how they had felt isolated, abandoned and in some instances betrayed by their care givers during and following the period in which they became care leavers' (Rogers, 2011, p.417). Her research concluded with a powerful statement that what young people most associated within the challenges of leaving care, was the 'removal of emotional support (more than practical support or advice)' (Ibid., p.423). It is vital therefore to take full account of the importance of emotions, and look to provide '...enabling research environments, encounters and exchanges' (Ross et al. 2009, p.605). In this way, we can prioritise the development of caring relations, so that young people are both cared-for and cared-about, and are enabled to care-for themselves and others.

Returning once more to the story to explore the 'otherness' of those who say 'wow', I am approaching this word in the footsteps of Jones (2008, p.196), seeing it as a way of sidestepping the '...adult agendas which seek to colonise and control childhood' by favouring an approach that acknowledges '...the background field of ethical, methodological and ontological fabric of any academic endeavour'. The 'Londoners' of which he speaks, are adults (and their accompanying children) who have come to 'look', to walk, and are symbolic of those identified by Haywood (in Convery et al., 2012, pp.23-4) as having created the 'Lake District': each '... circular journey undertaken on foot has become an important constituent of the Lakes' transformation from undifferentiated 'space' into 'a place'.' This is not Liz's place, this is the place constructed by adults, who by their very nature of being have different ways of understanding the world than children or young people do. Liz is in transition between these two states of being, betwixt the worlds of childhood and adulthood. As identified by Valentine (2003, p.38) this boundary crossing when '... childhood ends and adulthood begins is obscured by the liminal period of youth'; this is part of an ongoing process that shapes and defines a person. I believe that if we are going to attempt to understand what happens during this transitional phase, it is best to adopt a boundary-crossing approach to research, drawing from an interdisciplinary perspective that enables us to use the theoretical concepts and research methods that are most appropriate to the questions we want to address. Taking care as a specific example: this is a concept that invites a holistic approach; as a written word, it may be small, and appear insignificant, however in its application and practice, it is multi-faceted and complex, resulting in a variety of potential interpretations. To explore this within the boundaries of one particular

discipline would necessitate ignoring the very nature of it; limiting our ability to understand and make sense of it. However, it is important to note that this is an approach that invites critique and reproach, as it is widely acknowledged that ‘...integrating the findings from different methods or different disciplines in anything other than the most superficial of ways is challenging’ (Kessel et al., 2009, p.32). My response to this is that this challenge can be best addressed by presenting findings in a storied form, which maintains the complexity, avoids the ‘...implicit reductionism in unidisciplinary work’ (Ibid., p.37) and allows different interpretations depending on the perspective (discipline and preference) of the reader.

Life is an innately emotional and spatial process (Jones, 2005). How can we effectively provide support during youth, when as articulated by Jones (2008) we are forced to acknowledge that, as adults, even though we were once young people, we can no longer fully understand the world of young people? I have to acknowledge I am rapidly approaching my mid-century, and as such I am very different to Liz, I have all the baggage of adulthood with me. Recognising this difference serves to emphasise the importance of actively listening, of attending to, empathising with and caring about what Liz is saying, and also to the way I respond. I need to be conscious of normative, adultist expectations of how young people should be, how they should care, and what they should care about. Relating this to my research: if we want to encourage young people to care about nature, and to demonstrate this through practical ways of caring for nature, we need to allow them to do it their way, not ours. And this requires us to take time to notice how

they do this, for example Liz's slow, easily-missed moonlit 'wow': I noticed it because I was paying close attention, I was sharing the experience and ready to respond. This is all part of the caring process. I share this with you, the readers of this chapter with the aim of providing something more meaningful than a simple report of my research observations. With regard to Liz, this is a call to witness, to '... share and deeply empathize with pain and suffering—the negative (although it could be applied to joy and love—the positive) and otherness— without fully knowing it' (Jones, 2008, p.206).

Research presents us with a number of epistemological, methodological, ethical and political challenges (Jones, 2008), particularly when it involves those that are 'other' than us, for example: children and young people; those identified as 'care-leavers' and those of us who are not. However, it also presents us with a number of ethical and moral challenges which need to be addressed. Some of these challenges can be viewed as problems, in that after due consideration it becomes clear what action should be taken (Banks, 2010); others are more problematic and present as a dilemma in that whatever action is chosen, it involves some breaching of ethical principles. The choice is based on ethical reflection that includes a full contemplation of our morals and values, involving emotional as well as cognitive processes. As elucidated by Banks (2010, p.12): 'Ethical reflection is a process of mulling over, questioning and appraising a matter relating to human, animal or planetary flourishing'. This combination of personal responsibilities (for example, codes of practice and ethical guidelines) together with personal values (and moral codes) is fundamental to the process of caring – we need to be moral to respect the

well-being of those in a caring relation. It is not just about knowledge, it is more about receptivity, feeling and sensitivity (Noddings, 1986/2013) which contribute to awareness and understanding. From this stance, we can work from an informed perspective that enables us to be more effective in supporting others to learn – and to learn ourselves – to be kind to ourselves and each other. Fables are one way by which we can communicate this in a way that bears witness to experience, respects otherness and conveys a moral lesson: they are a method for demonstrating care.

Narrated stories, such as the one within this chapter, are a vital way to develop our awareness of the ways in which different caring practices are experienced. The storied-form allows us to engage with the emotional dimension of the experience, placing the central emphasis on the young person, on how Liz perceives himself and his position, his place in the world. The interdisciplinary nature of eliciting, interpreting and presenting research in this manner allows us to explore the experience in a more complex and holistic way, enabling us to learn so much more from it than would be possible from a more singular approach. By then embedding this discussion within a wider discourse that explores the concepts of care and caring, the focus shifts away from Liz and towards us, and to what we can learn from this, and meaningfully apply to our own situations – to our place(s) in life. So, who should care about others, about nature? We *all* should, because as explained so wonderfully by Spretnak, (2011, p.4, original emphasis in italics) ‘...all entities in the natural world, including us, are *thoroughly relational beings of great complexity, who are both composed of and nested within contextual networks of dynamic and reciprocal relationships*’.

Within one of my final conversations with Liz I asked him what would be his best outing outside, where would he choose to go, and he replied: *"My Perfect Place? I would go where the moon is rising, just sit there and look at the surroundings."* At the very heart of my PhD is a commitment to care about how things are experienced, articulated and interpreted, so that what we offer to young people is effective at meeting their needs, as well as our own and the needs of what we call 'nature'. I recognise that this commitment causes me to get 'bothered' and 'troubled', and at time to get angry; but that is because I *care*. However, I now recognise that as well as getting angry, I have found a lot of humour in my research; there have been silly moments, funny moments, times shared with young people when we have laughed so much we have struggled for breath; magic moments when the mutual recognition of the absurdity of a situation has left us speechless, yet noisy with laughter. I feel the need to go back and revisit these 'fragile' moments (Macpherson, 2008, p.1083) in a more mindful and careful way.

Writing this chapter has caused me to pause, reflect and extract meaning from this research encounter; this process has enabled me to reconsider my research from a number of different perspectives. Although there has been movement in recent years towards adopting a more interdisciplinary, creatively interpretive approach to research, this is still seen as controversial, arguably undisciplined, and is not generally accepted by policy makers as a credible method. There is still a political preference for more traditional, quantifiable and, in my opinion, simplistic methods, which ignore (or at the very least limit) the complexity, the nuance, the *messiness* and *funniness* of what we are studying. I find this unethical and more to the point,

unkind to those we are studying. This is an area that warrants further research and publication: we need to keep up the momentum of challenge, and to promote more caring, humane ways to conduct and present research. As stated in the introduction, and argued throughout this discussion, kindness is a behaviour defined by ethical characteristics, demonstrated by acting in a friendly and considerate manner. Therefore, I end by kindly inviting you to pause once more, to remember Liz, and to consider what does care mean to you – and why?

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## Chapter 10: Responsiveness

This paper is presented as a journal article, aiming for the Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning (JAEOL).<sup>93</sup> The empirical data which informed this paper was elicited near the end of my primary research (discussed in the paper). I originally wrote it in a first-person interpretation, as if Lexi was narrating the story herself, based on the interview transcript. Although this resulted in an interesting and engaging story, it did not feel right ethically or morally: it felt a step too far in terms of the creative process, away from an academic stance, and a potential abuse of my research position. This was confirmed when I shared it at a storytelling workshop in Oxford – reading it aloud, explaining it to others, I became increasingly uncomfortable with how I had written it. In this case, the first-person approach had not worked, I felt I was making too many assumptions about how she interpreted her experiences, rather than a more honest and open sharing of *my* interpretation of what she said (see pp.32-3 for discussion of the authorial ‘I’).

I therefore revised the story so that it has become a blend of our voices. The words directly attributed to Lexi are taken from the transcript of the recorded interview, used in the sequence in which they occurred, although they have been ‘tidied up’ within the spirit of creative nonfiction (see, for example, Cheney, 2001; Gutkind, 1997). I have included myself within the story to provide context, and to show how what she said was the result of our social interaction. Lexi was the last young person

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<sup>93</sup> Prior to submission, I will seek editorial advice as to whether to extrapolate this, making use of ellipses like my other papers, or to leave it in this format.

I formally interviewed as part of my research.<sup>94</sup> Her story, our story (below) seemed to capture the essence of my findings and enabled me to recognise it was time to stop. I present it here in a non-extrapolated manner to show you what I have found, rather than to tell you. As identified by Ingold (2000, p.21):

... the 'idea of showing is an important one. To show something to somebody is to cause it to be seen or otherwise experienced – whether by touch, taste, smell or hearing – by that other person.

This is an approach advocated by both Pelias (2004, p.1) as a way of inviting 'identification and empathetic connection' and Sparkes (2007, p.522), in that in this format, the tale '...simply asks for your consideration'. It does not linger on methodology or theoretical concepts, instead, leaving it open to the reader's interpretation.

I still have many magic moments left to explore, but they will form part of a different body of work. Lexi helped me to see that I had found enough for now.

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<sup>94</sup> I continued with naturalistic observations through my practice as a volunteer and member of the public.

### **Article title: Responsiveness - being, not doing: Lexi's story**

We meet at her local coffee shop, along with a practitioner from the project she attends. Once we've chosen our drinks we sit on the comfy sofas, at the far end of the room, furthest from the door. I explain more about my project, that I'm trying to find out what young people like to do outside. Lexi knows a bit about my work, the practitioner had told her which is why she asked to meet me ...

She tells me she likes walking, around the town, by the river: *"I try to get home early, because he doesn't like me out at night, he thinks I'm doing something. He's my ex, but he still lives with me. He's very controlling – where I go. And if I go out late at night, he's always wondering, where's she going, what's she doing. I like walking on my own, I can think then" ...*

We sip our drinks as she explains that she prefers walking by the river, it's nicer than the town, she likes water, the sound of it, especially after it's been raining. I ask her what birds she sees, but she doesn't see any. She watches the swans, which she says are like ducks, with webbed feet so they're not birds. She laughs at me as I attempt to explain that swans and ducks are birds, and that birds can have webbed feet. I ask, *"What makes a bird a bird?"* She laughs again and replies, *"Feathers. But a duck doesn't have feathers."* *"Well, they don't have fur, do they? What do you think they have?"* I respond. We both laugh at the thought of a furry bird – what a funny sight that would be. I gently describe how birds that live near water have special feathers that are waterproof, and some of them have webbed feet. She admits she's not really stopped to think about this before ...

I ask what else she likes about the river, and she says, *"It's just interesting – people go swimming, but I wouldn't even paddle there."* She paddled at the seaside with

her friend, but the river is rocky, has stones on the bottom, and people throw stuff in there. There's a strong current, you could get swept away ...

We move on to chat about a few other things she's done recently, ice skating, meeting up with friends, having an operation from which she's still recovering. She wanted to walk up a mountain, she was planning on doing it – I'd seen the planning and evaluation forms which confirmed this intention. But then she stayed on a residential, and they went for a walk to a view point, over the lake. She was sick, everywhere. She didn't get chance to look at the view, because by the time she got there everyone else was ready to move on ...

She'd still like to walk up a mountain, but asks us, *"If I can't make it up the first bit, how am I going to walk up a mountain? My mum said I should walk up Scafell! I don't think I could do that, when even a little bit of walking made me sick. I need a very small mountain, like a hill or something."* I know some really nice hills, that I think she may like, which I'd like to share with her, however that's not why I'm here, that's not my role ...

We move on to talk about other ways of being outside. She's recently helped with a gardening project which she enjoyed. After a lovely chat about gardening, I return to the subject of walking by the river. How is this different from being in the garden? From being on the residential? What other activities has she tried? What does she like doing? Is it important to go outside? She tells me it is, that she feels more energized - being cooped up inside she starts to think about bad things, outside she can think about good things. The doctor gave her some pills to help with anxiety, because she gets panic attacks. When she's walking, she can sort things out in her head. The fresh air helps: *"It can be very lonely inside, when you're there on*

*your own."* She likes walking on her own and feels less lonely outside, but she doesn't know why ...

I agree, it is difficult to know why, which is why I've been studying it. I ask her if she thinks other young people should go outside, and she replies, *"Yes, but only if they want to, it's everyone's choice."* She explains it is more difficult when you have health issues like anxiety. I gently question if it matters what activities we offer, and she asserts, *"You should think about people's abilities when planning activities, when I can't do something that others can, I think they're going to laugh at me, it makes me upset and not want to go out" ...*

To bring the interview to a close, I explain how my project started, from my experiences as an environmental youth worker – which is how I know about birds. I ask her if being outside may make people want to look after outdoor places, *"Does being in a garden make you want to look after that garden?"* She replies, *"For me it does. When I sit in a garden, then I want to look after that garden, that's me, I don't know if other people feel like that. The school I went to had a garden just outside the school grounds, but all the druggies went there, wasn't safe. I wanted to look after that garden, but they said we didn't have the budget, and the teachers didn't want to do it".* At that school, she only went outside for P.E. and a little bit of science: *"We even had nature class inside, never went out. We learned about plants' names, but not what they do. We looked at them in books, it was so boring, can't remember anything from that class, there wasn't even one plant in the room. They could do more at school to teach people about this stuff" ...*

She tells me again she really likes swans, they have big wings and can fly, then questions if I'm sure a swan is a bird? She still thinks it's more of a duck ...

We agreed this is the end of the interview. However, we continued to chat, and I explained how I used to teach 'nature class'. The recorder was still running, and listening to it again, I was struck by the words I used, and how the picture they describe could be perceived to be a metaphor for the way I have conducted my research. I have transcribed the spoken words and present them in the form of a short poem:

**See this flower...**

We look at it first, we get up really close and look at it,  
And then, if it's not too fragile, we can touch it, see what it feels like,  
And then we can smell it, to see what it smells like,  
And if it's edible, and there's lots of it, we will pick it,  
And we can taste it, to see what it tastes like,  
And if it's windy, we'll get our ears down low,  
And we'll see what it sounds like when the wind is blowing,  
And we'll use all our senses, we'll do all that,  
And then we might go and look at a book,  
And see what someone else has thought about it,  
But we'll get to know it ourselves first,  
Is that the kind of nature class you'd like?

I recall she silently nodded her response. The tape did not capture this. I did not record it in my field notebook. Yet in my memories, she also smiled. I have not seen her since this encounter. I hope she has continued walking by a river. I hope she has been able to find some peace in her mind. And I really hope she has walked up her small mountain.



## **Chapter 11: A practical toolkit for practitioners**

This practical toolkit was commissioned by one of the organisations that participated in my research, and has a specific purpose of supporting practitioners with their continuing professional development (CPD). It was launched within a CPD workshop, attended by nine participants, from eight different organisations based in the north of England. For completeness, I have provided a PDF copy of it here in my thesis.<sup>95</sup> The examiners of my PhD have been provided with a professionally printed copy.

My ability to undertake this commission was only possible because my work occurs within a Practice-Research-Pedagogy nexus. Each element is important in its own right, and in the way it informs and guides my work in the other elements. Producing the toolkit has provided me with a tangible output from my research and makes a practical contribution to knowledge. Developing it has helped my teaching as early drafts formed the basis for teaching sessions with first and second year university students. This has been a benefit to them, as sharing my research in this pedagogical way has introduced them to the world of applied, practical research. Their feedback and comments helped me to refine and improve the draft version.

The commission included delivery of a practitioners' workshop and post-workshop report (Appendix iii) which provided the opportunity for me to evaluate whether the toolkit would be useful in practice. The critical discussions, feedback and

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<sup>95</sup> The text may not appear as crisp and clear here as the professionally-printed copy. It is also available to download as a PDF from my website: <http://www.makingsenseofnature.co.uk/making-sense-of-nature>

comments from workshop delegates, together with my reflections further refined the draft version. The organisation paid for professional designing and printing, and then disseminated it wider than would have been possible on my own. For me, it is important that this is recognised as a collaborative project, therefore when asked for my preference, I chose to cite as co-authors both the organisation's project worker, and the manager who commissioned it. Unfortunately, I do not have feedback on how it was subsequently received, used, or what impact it has had, as the project has been closed and the project staff have moved on to new areas of work. This is one of the frustrations of short-term funded projects (see p.97).



This  
**guide**  
has been  
created as a  
**practical aid**  
to **assist**

- 1. Practitioners who work with SEN/D young people to support them to discover their local outdoor spaces.**
- 2. Practitioners who work in outdoor spaces to support them to work with young people with SEN/D.**

It is important to understand both of these perspectives.

The guide contains short stories – *Magic Moments*<sup>1</sup> – used to highlight the key learning points from the 'We're in the Wild' project. It also includes tips for developing and managing a similar project – taking you from the first steps of having a good idea for an activity, to the final steps of assessing its effectiveness.

<sup>1</sup> Hayes T (2016) PhD Thesis

“ Our children have increased confidence in their personal abilities through completing tasks and activities. They have been able to transfer skills learnt in a classroom to other areas and activities

**Teacher at SEN/D school**

## Foreword

'We're in the Wild' was a three-year project run by Plantlife and funded by the National Lottery through the Big Lottery Fund. It was designed to increase opportunities to connect children and young people with their local outdoor spaces. Some of the key project outcomes are listed below:

- ☀ Children and young people report improved confidence and self-esteem as a result of accessing social, interactive, learning opportunities in local green spaces.
- ☀ Through accessing and contributing to various local outdoor opportunities, children and young people report feeling more involved in their community and less isolated.
- ☀ Children and young people will have improved academic skills, motivation, and psychological and physical well-being through increased access, enjoyment and learning in the local environment.

As the project progressed, it became clear that SEN/D schools and groups in particular have limited opportunity to access local green spaces. Through consultation, relationships were developed with SEN/D schools and youth groups and new programmes of activity evolved. These built confidence and trust – opportunities being offered in school grounds initially, then moving into local parks. This approach enabled young people to discover new skills and then build on them – for some, this included using tools for the first time.

*“The enthusiasm and expertise of the project officer sets the project apart from others that I have been involved with in the past. All the activities were relevant and moved the children's learning forward at an appropriate pace*

**University lecturer**



## 1. Introduction

### Using this guide

The guide outlines simple steps to take when planning activities for SEN/D outdoors. These are presented in a diagram on page 6 and each step explained in turn. It is important to think about the process and to consider all steps. However, this is not a linear or one-way process, it is cyclical and ongoing and each step is of equal importance.

To be effective, we are looking to provide experiences that are meaningful, relevant and inspiring. Most of all they should be enjoyable and fun! We want young people to feel comfortable and be safe whilst exploring outdoors, so that they will want to continue going out. This guide provides a starting point – at the end, you will find suggestions for further supportive information.

*“Although there were more specialist resources available to us, staying within the school grounds limited what we could do with the young people. The trees available were mostly small/young and had been purposely planted. The grass area was small, muddy in places and the participants’ footwear/clothes unsuitable. This meant that we had to restrict our activities to ensure their safety.”*

### Who is this booklet relevant to?

**Young people defined as having SEN/D** This includes young people who have been assessed as having severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). They almost always have a statement of special educational needs (pre-2014) or an education, health and care (EHC) plan (post-2014). SEN/D may impact on a young person’s ability to learn, affecting their behaviour or ability to socialise; reading and writing; ability to understand things; concentration levels and/or physical ability.

The term SEN/D covers a wide range of individual needs, and some young people may have their needs accommodated within a mainstream school or college. Within a specialist school, all the children and young people will have been assessed as having severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties and may have other learning needs in addition, such as:

- ✿ Autistic Spectrum Disorder
- ✿ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- ✿ Visual and/or Auditory Impairment
- ✿ Medical or Health Difficulties
- ✿ Behavioural or Social Difficulties

Meeting this level of often conflicting needs within a group can be a challenge and requires an open and honest approach to your own learning and support needs (we all have them).

When thinking about people, with or without identified SEN/D, it is important to remember that we all have different ways of seeing, interpreting and understanding the world around us – our ‘world view’ may not be the same as someone else’s. We need to show that we respect this difference through the language we use, and the way we refer to people around us.

**People who work with SEN/D** This represents a diverse group of people: teachers, teaching assistants, nurses, carers, students, volunteers, parents, grandparents – plus all the other staff involved in running specialist provisions. Schools can adapt to meet the needs of the individual student as far as is practicable. Due to the often complex nature of the needs of the students, teachers and learning support staff work very much in partnership with parents and professionals to provide the best learning environment possible for each student. This is useful to know, as it is a source of support and guidance for you.

**People who work in the outdoors** This diverse group includes rangers, education officers, volunteers (including Friend of Groups) and conservation workers. They have knowledge and understanding of the needs of local outdoor spaces. This is useful to know, as this is another source of support and information for you.





### What kinds of places and spaces is this booklet relevant to?

What is a 'local outdoor space'? This is not a guide to visiting residential places, or to outdoor spaces that are purposely designed to meet the needs of young people with SEN/D. This is a guide to exploring spaces that are local to where we live, work or study that are generally open to the general public and are on our doorstep. Because of this, we need to consider the space carefully to ensure we meet the needs of the wildlife flora and fauna that live there, as well as the people who also use the space.

### What do we mean by inclusion?

There are many potential barriers to participation it is about more than the ability of the young person. Some barriers are political, some social, some cultural. Sometimes we are so busy doing things, learning new skills and following a curriculum that we do not allow enough time for just being there. One of the key learning points from the 'We're in the Wild' project is that young people with SEN/D particularly relish opportunities to be playful outdoors, and to try new things that they perceive to be risky. These activities need to be adapted to meet each individual's specific needs.

## 2. Starting with you

Before planning a new project outdoors with young people identified as having SEN/D, it is important to consider:

### What is your motivation for starting the project?

- ☀ Why are you doing it?
- ☀ What are you hoping to achieve?

### What skills, knowledge and experience do you have?

- ☀ If you are a SEN/D practitioner, how confident are you about using outdoor spaces? Identify your strengths and weaknesses do you need any extra training?
- ☀ If you are an outdoor practitioner, how confident are you in working with young people with SEN/D? Again, identify if you need any specific training.

### Who do you know that may be able to work with you?

- ☀ What skills, knowledge and experience can they share with you?
- ☀ What skills, knowledge and experience can you share with them?



### 3. Effectively exploring outdoors with SEN/D

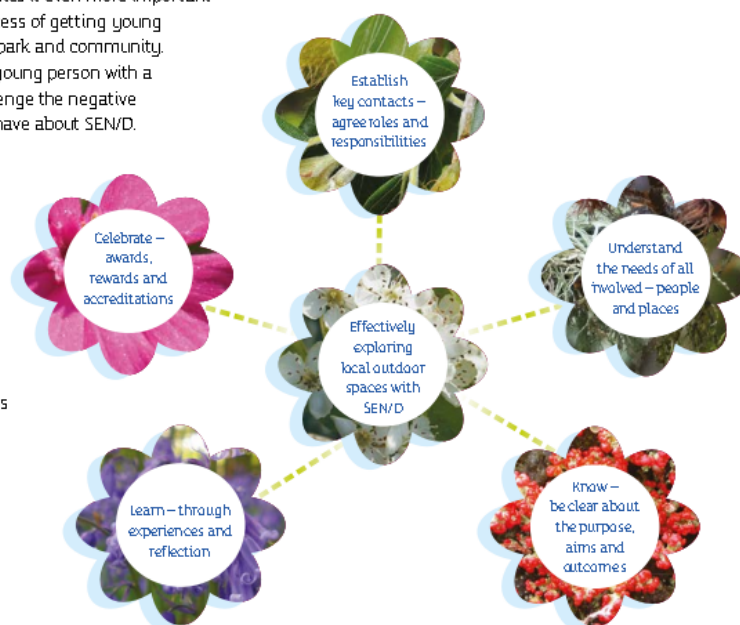
For many young people identified as SEN/D, local outdoor spaces may prove a challenge, particularly for those who attend specialist provision (non-mainstream schools). Our research has indicated that pupils are regularly transported significant distances from home to school, and that once there, they have a tendency to stay within the school grounds. As a result, most schools have well-designed outdoor spaces, fully accessible to their students with a wide range of specialist resources. In contrast, most local outdoor spaces are designed for more general public use, may be difficult to access and rely on you to have the right resources.

Conversations with teaching staff, parents and young people revealed that for many of the students, school represented more than a formal education, it was also the main space for their social education. Most of the young people (and their parents/carers) we met were reluctant to explore outdoors alone, fearing misunderstanding and intimidation from other, unknown people. This makes it even more important to think carefully about the process of getting young people involved with their local park and community. We are aiming to provide each young person with a positive experience and to challenge the negative images that some people may have about SEN/D.

The model (Hayes, 2016) (right) can be used at three key stages of the process of effectively exploring outdoors with SEN/D:

- 1) Before going outdoors
- 2) Being outdoors
- 3) After coming in from outdoors

Figure 1: A model to guide the process of Effectively Exploring local outdoor spaces with young people who have SEN/D (Hayes, 2016)



**Before going outdoors** Apply each step to this phase of the process.

#### Establish

Make contact with local schools and with groups responsible for local parks to find out who you need to meet with. Local volunteering and conservation groups are a good source of information. The 'We're in the Wild' project found that the best method for reaching people, adults and young people, was through direct communication, attending staff meetings, youth club sessions – meeting people and letting them get to know the project, and more importantly, who was running it and why. It allowed them to put a face to the project and helped them to appreciate how accommodating and adaptable the project could be to fit the needs of the groups, therefore breaking down barriers or concerns they may have had.



## Understand

It is important to understand the needs of all those who are involved – the people, animals, plants and places.

- ✿ Your local green space will be owned/managed by someone, so you need to understand who this is, what they do and how you may work with them. Walking round the green space with the manager can help you understand the site; areas that may be quieter or more appropriate for activities, the opportunities for activities – for example, coppicing, managing invasive plants.
- ✿ Face-to-face contact enabled us to establish a relationship with adult leaders and young people, identify expectations and agree roles and responsibilities. It enabled us to understand the needs of all those we were working with and check through ideas. It is important to “...establish and maintain a culture of high expectations” (DfE and DoH, 2015) by enabling young people with SEN/D to experience opportunities that are available to other young people<sup>2</sup>.
- ✿ Spending time observing young people in their school or youth group setting allows you to develop relationships with young people (become a familiar face), understand individual needs and interests and gain an idea of appropriate level of language. It is important to think carefully about the language we use, and to remember that although young people may have been identified as having SEN/D, they are first and foremost young people. As explained by Audre Lorde (1984) “...the important point is that one aspect of ourselves should not be used to define the whole of us”. Being understanding involves recognising and being receptive to others’ needs, their feelings/emotional needs, as well as their more obvious physical/mobility needs. One of the teachers we worked with explained why the project was so effective, praising the Plantlife project officer: “She was sensitive to their (varying) needs and spoke to them at their level whilst encouraging them to both share their knowledge and extend it.”
- ✿ To help you at this stage of the process, before you step outside with your group, talk to other people, read about other projects and learn from them. You will find that most projects are keen to share their learning.

“The teacher walked with me and explained to me about some of the challenges of working with PMLD (profound and multiple learning difficulties) – the endless forms to enable them to leave the classroom/school; how to play games such as I-spy, adapting to meet their needs

## Know

Before you step outside, you need to be clear about the purpose for doing so, as well as the aims and outcomes you are looking for. You must consider the skills and knowledge of all involved, before you can offer specific opportunities and activities. For example, you may need someone to help with willow weaving, bird box making and arts/crafts. Then you will have to complete the health and safety and risk assessment forms. We found that working with schools involved a lot of paperwork; make sure you allow enough time to do this so that you are not left waiting in reception for someone's permission to allow you to take the young people outside. Know what is needed, and when you need to do it.

“When we arrived at the school, the teacher in charge informed us that they had decided it would not be appropriate to take the young people to the park, due to the adverse weather conditions. It was clear that neither teachers nor pupils had outdoor footwear/clothes, only their usual attire (including soft, fabric shoes). We spoke with the staff and emphasised the importance of preparing for sessions by reminding students and their parents to dress appropriately. On subsequent visits to the school, we found that the staff had put together a bag of additional clothing – just in case it was needed

<sup>2</sup> Department for Education and Department of Health (2015) Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years

## Learn

When planning your activities, you need to think about how you are going to capture the learning, in a meaningful way. The 'We're in the Wild' project used a number of methods, including:

- ✿ Online surveys – such as Survey Monkey
- ✿ Hard copy surveys – on paper
- ✿ Project diary
- ✿ Photographic evidence – photos, videos, voice recordings
- ✿ Notes from meetings
- ✿ E-mails
- ✿ Direct communication and feedback
- ✿ Thank you cards and letters

This enabled us to think about our experiences, identify what we had done, how we had done it and to consider if we could have done anything differently. This is all part of the process of reflection, and there are three questions that may be used to guide this process:

- 1. What?** Think about how you are going to keep records of what you are doing.
- 2. So what?** Consider how you are going to identify the learning, and how you will know that your activities have made a difference.
- 3. Now what?** Use this information to help you plan your next activities – what do you need to do more of/less of/ do differently?

“Excellent organised lessons, individualised to the need of our pupils, lessons are very informative and interesting, excellent relationship with pupils

Youth club leader

## Celebrate

This is a very important aspect, and it involves planning for how you are going to recognise young people's achievements. This may include awards schemes such as Plantlife's Young Wardens, John Muir Award (three different levels), rewards, certificates and accreditations. Some young people may want a reference, something they can add to their CV that may help them when looking for work or further study. Some schools may invite you to their school assemblies – a great opportunity for presenting certificates. Open days and events are a good way to celebrate, especially if you invite others along to join in. However, you need to carefully consider the needs of your group, and establish what is their preferred way to celebrate. Don't forget to recognise and celebrate your own achievements.

“The teacher explained that many young people with PMLD and SEN/D have low self-esteem and self-confidence, having been damaged by their earlier experiences. Two in his class had been refused admission by every other school, and had been described as 'Devil children'. Since coming to this school much work has been undertaken to help them recover from this



**Being outdoors** As before, the model can be used to support you to plan this phase of the process. However, the most important thing about this phase is to enjoy BEING outside, the model is only a prompt – don't let it get in the way of what you are doing.

### Establish

Agree a way of working together by establishing 'ground rules' – what you are allowed to do, how far you are allowed to go, and what you are going to do if someone challenges this agreement. We found that this approach had a very positive impact on young people, helping them to develop risk perception, social, motivational and leadership skills. It is important to keep a healthy balance between enabling freedom and managing risk. For example, the guidance for schools provided by RoSPA<sup>3</sup> is that we should endeavour to make activities as safe as necessary, not as safe as possible. By being 'risk aware, but not risk averse' we can establish an effective way to safely enjoy being outdoors.

*“It was great we used real tools,” the words of a 14-year-old student identified as having special educational needs, when asked if he had enjoyed a bird box making activity. With the correct supervision, most people can gain an understanding of tool technique, and in the process develop skills around risk perception and the benefits of using personal protective equipment*

### Understand

We found that some young people are reluctant to try new things or visit unknown spaces. Allow sufficient time for them to become more comfortable and to find things that they enjoy doing. Talking through activities in advance, rehearsing the route that will be taken and showing pictures of the space you will be using are all methods for developing familiarity and comfort before you leave the school grounds.

Some of the young people may not fully engage with the planned activities, and may become bored quite quickly, especially if they are not used to being outside. A box/bag of extra resources can come in very handy – a 'distraction box' of items that they can choose from will enable them to follow their own interests. We have found it useful to include things like string, sticky tape, paper, wax crayons (good for bark rubbings), disposable cameras, straws, magnifiers, toys (that are okay to get muddy), egg boxes for treasure hunts, simple identification guides. And understand the space you are exploring – there may be lots of natural things available to use (sticks, leaves, trees/bushes for hide-and-seek).

*“It's not all playing games, young people like to 'keep it real'. “I didn't want to go outdoors at first but it was actually good fun. I enjoyed doing heather management and cutting back shrubbery.” But it is still fun*

<sup>3</sup> The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents – [www.rospa.com/rospaweb/docs/advice-services/school-college-safety/managing-safety-schools-colleges.pdf](http://www.rospa.com/rospaweb/docs/advice-services/school-college-safety/managing-safety-schools-colleges.pdf)



## Know

If you have followed the steps earlier, you will have a clear idea of what activities you are allowed to do within the space, and what the school will allow you to do with the young people. This will be evidenced within your risk assessment forms. A prompt card for lead and support staff (those who work with the young people on a day-to-day basis) can be useful to help empower them in the session, know the activities and take leadership. This is particularly important when working with young people with SEN/D, as many of them will have individual support.

Remember that in public spaces, there is the potential for unplanned things to occur, so you need to remain vigilant. For example, we discovered that dogs (and their owners) hold a special appeal for some young people, and as a result we had to teach the young people how to approach dogs safely by first checking with the owner that it was safe to do so. You need to know how long you have available for activities, and what time the young people need to be back at the school. Many young people who attend SEN/D schools travel a considerable distance in buses and taxis and therefore punctuality is important.

*“On our approach to the park, we noticed that the pedestrian crossing (adapted for wheelchairs) over the main road was full of rotting leaves. The Plantlife project officer subsequently made a call to the local council to make them aware of this, and the leaves were cleared away. On subsequent visits, the crossing was noticeably clear – a benefit to the community as a whole, not just the SEN/D school*



## Learn

We found that we learned a lot from the young people, some of whom are very knowledgeable about different plants and animals and were keen to share this with us. They were very good at spotting things and finding interesting things to look at. Our tip for you is to look for the learning opportunities, be responsive to:

- What else is happening in the park – and how this may complement what you are doing. For example, seeing someone feeding ducks can spark conversations about ducks, food, care so many options.
- How young people are responding to what is on offer – and be prepared to change the activity if it is not working.
- The weather, in particular young people with limited mobility, can get cold very quickly. Learning to recognise how the weather impacts on them can spark conversations about weather, clothing, things to do to keep warm.

## Celebrate

Share and celebrate whilst you are outside – for example, when someone overcomes their fear of spiders to take a look at a spider's web. Look for the signs of the changing seasons, and think about how this can be celebrated – song, dance, games, rhymes, poetry, stories.

*“A class from a SEN/D school undertook a willow weaving activity whilst working towards a John Muir Award. A 15-year-old student with severe ADHD became particularly engrossed in the activity. The teacher was amazed at his dedication, as the student found it very difficult to focus during classroom lessons. This made a lasting impression on the young person, who asked to go back and do some more weaving*





“ I enjoyed learning about wildlife through fun and games

**After coming in from outdoors** Apply each step to this phase of the process to bring the activity/project to an effective close.

### Establish

Reflect on the experience with all those who participated and find out:

- What they thought of it, what it meant to them.
- What they found most interesting.
- What they found most challenging.
- What they would like to do again.

This can be used to plan future activities and encourage groups, to see how they could continue doing activities like this without you guiding them. In conversations with them, explore how they can do similar activities with their families, carers, friends or in the school. In doing this, the work becomes more sustainable.

Many people, of all ages, struggle to concentrate in an indoor environment, and find academic work challenging. However, they may excel when it comes to practical, outdoor activities. In the words of one young person: "I enjoyed going outside, I don't do very well stuck in the classroom, I begin to get agitated and claustrophobic." A group of students who were visually impaired went out to discover their local outdoors. Afterwards they were asked what they gained from the activities. One 13-year-old student said: "It was a good experience. It allowed us to use our other senses." Another student responded: "It allowed us to do things independently."

*The project officer was incredibly knowledgeable and enthusiastic... This enthused the children very much. She was sensitive to their (varying) needs and spoke to them at their level, whilst encouraging them to share their knowledge and extend it*

### Understand

Some young people may not be able to use verbal communication to show what they have enjoyed or how much, so it is important to consider other methods for evaluating what the experience meant to them. Talk to those who normally care for them, observe their body language, particularly how they respond to the activities offered. Try to capture this while outside so that it can be added to the post-activity reflection and evaluation. If possible, include feedback from the people who manage the outdoor space – has your project/activity had an impact on the space or on the local community?

### Know

Look back at your planning and assess if you have met your aims and outcomes; did you do what you planned to do? If not, why not? Look for other, unplanned outcomes that have resulted from your project. Know what was good about your project and what could be improved.

### Learn

This is integral to the previous three aspects (establish, understand and know), so considering these together helps you to gain a holistic overview and identify what are the key learning points, the 'Magic Moments' from your project.







### Celebrate

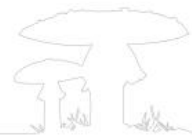
Once you have identified your Magic Moments, the successes of the project and the individual achievements of each young person, use the most appropriate methods to share this. This may encourage other people/groups to do something similar and to discover for themselves what their local outdoor spaces are really like and how they can make effective use of them.

Help spread the word that we can ALL be wild in outdoor spaces in ways that are relevant and appropriate to meet our own individual needs and interests. One of the visually impaired students wrote a letter to us about the project which we would like to share. It has been translated from Braille.

*“ It gave my class of children a great opportunity to take their learning outdoors which has been a priority for our school. The activities were relevant, informative and fun. The project officer also took time to get to know the children, who are all on the Autistic Spectrum, so this is so very important*

*To whom it may concern*

*The John Muir Award consists of outdoor exploring. I really enjoyed it because I like anything to do with nature. Due to my visual impairment I like to do tactile activities and use my other senses, including: my listening skills, touch, smell and taste. I was able to make my own perfume with leaves, plants and petals, which I really enjoyed. It was totally inspiring and it's good that people take the time and enjoy helping visually impaired young people to achieve new tasks.*



## 4. Activity suggestions

There are lots of books suggesting outdoor activities for young people, including:

- ☀ Sharing Nature with Children (1999) by Joseph Cornell
- ☀ Go Wild!: 101 Things to do Outdoors before you Grow Up (2009) by Fiona Danks and Jo Schofield
- ☀ 101 Things for Kids to do Outside (2014) by Dawn Isaac
- ☀ Learning with Nature: A How-to Guide to Inspiring Children through Outdoor Games and Activities (2015) by Marina Robb, Victoria Mew and Anna Richardson
- ☀ Celebrating Nature (2003) by Gordon MacLellan
- ☀ Under the Sky: Playing, Working and Enjoying Adventures in the Open Air – A Handbook for Parents, Carers and Teachers (Bringing Spirit to Life) (2009) by Sally Schweizer
- ☀ Outdoors with Young People: A Leader's Guide to Outdoor Activities, the Environment and Sustainability (1998) by Geoff Cooper
- ☀ Earth Education: A New Beginning (1990) by Steve Van Matre
- ☀ I Love my World (2009/12) by Chris Holland

Plantlife's 'Exploring the Nature on your Doorstep: A Guide for Teachers' provides lots of ideas for activities, all of which have been used within the 'We're in the Wild' project and can be easily adapted to accommodate a range of needs.

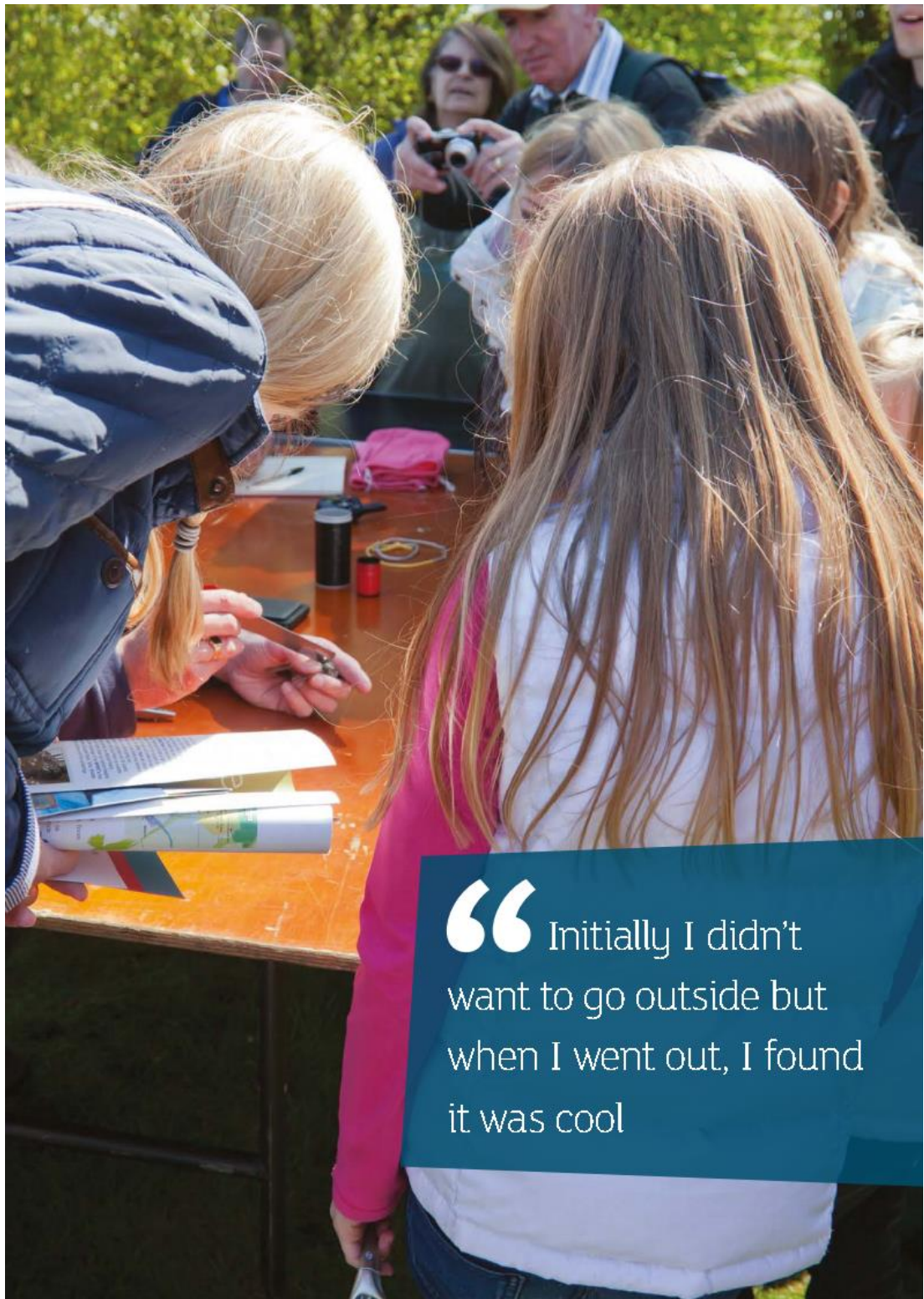
### Adapting activities

We have developed a simple checklist for adapting activities, with an example based on an activity from Chris Holland's book (2012, page 25) 'Blobsters' although we prefer to call them 'Boggarts'.

**Summary of the activity:** Each participant is given a small lump of clay and asked to turn it into a 'somebody' by adding sticks, leaves, stones, berries whatever can be found in the nearby area. Whilst the group is exploring the area, finding things to add to their clay, there is time for conversations around what you can see, hear, feel, smell – making this a multi-sensory experience. We found that it is useful to provide enough resources for everyone to join in teachers, carers, parents and us, as this enabled adults to model the activities for the young people and reinforced that this was an activity for all ages. It also made it more fun for everyone.







“Initially I didn't want to go outside but when I went out, I found it was cool

## Checklist of things to consider<sup>4</sup>

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT	OUR RESPONSE TO THIS	HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND?
<b>ESTABLISH</b> How is the task developmentally appropriate for the young people?	We need to avoid being seen as patronising by offering activities that are perceived as too childish by some young people – remember that there will be a range of developmental abilities. For example, whilst some young people may be happy 'taking teddy for a walk', others may react to this suggestion by swearing loudly and throwing teddy in the nearest lake!	
<b>UNDERSTAND</b> How does the activity appropriately challenge the participants?	Boggarts is an activity suitable for all ages – and encourages use of the imagination. It can be linked to favourite books, TV programmes or films. One of the young people who participated in the 'We're in the Wild' project called every bird she spotted 'Kevin' – a reference to the film 'Up'. This connection was more important to her than attempting to learn the proper names of the birds we saw.	
<b>KNOW</b> How does the activity support collaborative and co-operative learning?	<p>We want to encourage young people to explore their local spaces and see what they can find – however this won't work if there is nothing for them to find. The place needs to be checked prior to the activity and, if needed, some resources strategically placed for them to find. Remember that this is a public space so don't leave things too early (they may go missing) and clear up when you're finished.</p> <p>Young people with physical disabilities/limited mobility may need nature bringing to them – we found that trays on wheelchairs provided a useful place for making things.</p> <p>We found that the more active young people tended to help out the less physically active, running backwards and forwards, bringing things to their friends, particularly those in wheelchairs. Boggarts is an activity that really does encourage conversation: "Look what I've made...can I see yours?" "That looks good, how did you do that/find that/where can I find that?"</p>	

<sup>4</sup> Checklist adapted from Jones, P. (2005) *Inclusion in the Early Years: stories of good practice*. London: David Fulton Publishers Ltd.

### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

### OUR RESPONSE TO THIS

### HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND?

#### LEARN

How does your evaluation strategy help you to identify the learning, to reflect on the process of learning as well as the product of the learning?

Learning is a dynamic process, involving lots of little steps along the way. When making something like a Boggart, it is not just about the final product (although Boggarts are very photogenic) – it is about the skills involved. These include: team-working; communication and language; numeracy (counting Boggarts); creativity and imagination; social skills and health and wellbeing<sup>5</sup>.

#### CELEBRATE

How does the activity allow you to recognise progress and achievement?

We found that young people with emotional and/or behavioural support needs got frustrated if they found things too difficult, and were tempted to give up. So we ensured we were on hand to observe, support and encourage, and to recognise (celebrate) during the process – not leaving it to the end. This helped to build confidence and self-esteem – and also makes it more fun because you can chat whilst making the Boggart.

#### WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS TO CONSIDER?

We identified these as:

- ☀ The skill and confidence of the facilitator – which take time to develop, so be gentle with yourself at the beginning and be open to learning from others.
- ☀ The language that is used – they are young people with SEN/D, not SEN/D young people – they are first and foremost young people, their 'needs' are but a part of them<sup>6</sup>.
- ☀ Being responsive to the individuals in the group – some, particularly the less active, may become cold very quickly; others may find it hard to focus for very long. We found that simple games like 'I-spy' and camouflage hide-and-seek were helpful in these situations. And Boggarts can become part of the game!

<sup>5</sup> The health and wellbeing benefits of being outside are well reported.

<sup>6</sup> See Audie Lorde on page 7 also page 18 of Jones (2005)







“ We got to do everything we planned and did a bit more than we thought



## Further information

### Support with SEN/D

- Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)  
[www.gov.uk/children-with-special-educational-needs](http://www.gov.uk/children-with-special-educational-needs)

### Support with finding outdoor spaces, ideas for activities and sources for practitioner training and development

- Plantlife  
[www.plantlife.org.uk](http://www.plantlife.org.uk)
- Local Wildlife Trusts  
[www.wildlifetrusts.org/your-local-trust](http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/your-local-trust)
- Woodland Trust: Discover the World on your Doorstep  
[www.woodlandtrust.org.uk](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk)
- National Trust: 50 Things to do before you're 11+  
[www.50things.org.uk/find-a-place.aspx](http://www.50things.org.uk/find-a-place.aspx)
- Institute for Outdoor Learning (IOL) provides lots of opportunities for training and development  
[www.outdoor-learning.org](http://www.outdoor-learning.org)
- John Muir Award is an environmental award scheme for people of all backgrounds – groups, families, individuals. It's non-competitive, inclusive and accessible  
[www.johnmuirtrust.org/john-muir-award](http://www.johnmuirtrust.org/john-muir-award)
- Forest School Association (FSA) is the professional body and dedicated voice for Forest School within the UK. They are devoted to promoting quality Forest School for all, and a source for ongoing CPD  
[www.forestschoollassociation.org/what-is-forest-school](http://www.forestschoollassociation.org/what-is-forest-school)
- If you're feeling more adventurous, Calvert Trust: Challenging Disability Through Outdoor Adventure  
[www.calvert-trust.org.uk](http://www.calvert-trust.org.uk)

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Plantlife is a charitable company limited by guarantee. Company No. 3166339. Registered in England and Wales, Charity No. 1059559. Registered in Scotland, Charity No. SC038951.

ISBN: 978-1-910212-38-7

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This guide was written by Tracy Hayes, Anne Faulkner and Felicity Harris 2016

Design: [www.lumous.uk](http://www.lumous.uk)

Print: Orchard Press Ltd [www.orchard-press.co.uk](http://www.orchard-press.co.uk)



## We are Plantlife

Wild flowers, plants and fungi play a fundamental role for wildlife, and their colour and character light up our landscapes. But without our help, this priceless natural heritage is in danger of being lost. Plantlife is the organisation that speaks up for our wild plants, lichens and fungi. From the open spaces of our nature reserves to the corridors of government, we're here to raise their profile, celebrate their beauty and to protect their future.

Join us in enjoying the very best that nature has to offer.

**Britain's countryside. Save it with flowers**

This guide is designed to connect children and young people with their local outdoor spaces, resulting in improved confidence and self esteem; academic skills and motivation; and psychological and physical wellbeing through increased access, enjoyment and learning in the local environment. The project has been supported with funding from:

Big Lottery Fund  
The Camelia Trust  
D S Smith Charitable Foundation  
Duchy of Lancaster Benevolent Fund (Merseyside)  
Eleanor Rathbone Charitable Trust  
The Equitable Charitable Trust  
Four Winds Trust  
Hemby Charitable Trust  
The Nineveh Charitable Trust  
Rainford Trust  
The William Dean Trust  
The Woodward Charitable Trust



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## PART THREE: CLOSING THE CONVERSATION

In the end we will conserve only what we love,  
we will love only what we understand,  
and we will understand only what we are taught.

(Dioum, 1968)

This section starts with a quote I have been using within my practical and academic presentations for more than 15 years, and using it here serves three specific purposes: to identify where I started from in terms of my research; to illustrate where I have moved to as a result of my research, and to be consistent with my narrative approach.<sup>96</sup> I started my doctoral research with a firm belief that for conservation/environmental activities to be effective, in terms of the individual's experience, there needs to be a strong foundation of understanding and affection for nature. I found the inclusion of teaching within this quote to be particularly astute. How can we expect young people, who may have very limited knowledge or first-hand experience of the natural environment, or who have had negative experiences, to feel enthusiastic about being asked to care for it? However, through undertaking this study, I now believe that within this teaching process, it is more important to show than to tell, emphasising experiential learning, by sharing experiences in a way which allows each person to find their own meaning. I have also developed a deep personal and professional aversion to exhortations to 'step outside your comfort zone' and have come to realise how important it is to enable people to feel comfortable outside, to feel a sense of belonging (for examples, see p.98; p.152; p.163; p.190; p.204), particularly if they are feeling marginalised or

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<sup>96</sup> This includes a strong autobiographical / autoethnographical stance.



excluded in other areas of their life. This aversion started as a personal response, a questioning of why someone I had recently met felt qualified to say this to me. It then moved on to more of an informed response, based on the experiences and conversations within my study. As an example, I offer an extract from one of the interviews with a practitioner

**Me:** “Some of the young people I’ve been speaking to have been saying that when they come here, one of the things that has the biggest impact on them is the chance to breathe, to take some time out, to ...not to do anything, but just to sit quietly for a bit.... have you seen that? Is that something you’ve experienced?”

**Him:** “It physically removes them from their world and they’re brought to a completely different place that’s safe for them to explore all of the issues that they’ve got. It’s someone who’s not going to judge them, that they can talk to, it’s a very safe space that’s created for them... I think definitely removing them from where they normally are, I wouldn’t use the phrase it is their comfort zone, because for a lot of them, they’re not comfortable where they are, it’s probably in their ‘panic zone’ where a lot of them are living. But physically being removed from that and being brought here, to a place that is different, it removes a lot of that pressure, and then that being reinforced by members of staff, and not just the project workers, all the staff they come into contact with, are all very understanding of their needs as young people.”

One of the key findings from my research is that young people, and practitioners, respond most enthusiastically when the facilitator of outdoor learning experiences is perceived to be playful, inclusive and kind. I have felt compelled to be the same when disseminating my work and to embody my findings. I now argue we need to add to Dioum’s quote to emphasise the importance of *how* we are taught, and *who* it is that influences these choices. Explaining this assertion forms the basis of the last part of my thesis, which is presented in three chapters, structured using a recognised theoretical model (Rolfe et al., 2001). This model is based on asking



three fundamental questions: What? Now What? So what? Although this may be perceived to be a simplistic model, it provides a clear and usable framework for structuring this section, framing it in everyday, understandable language. It is the model used within the Practitioners' Toolkit (Chapter 11) and it offers a contrast with the more academic framing of the Map of Reflective Writing (Moon, 2004) used in Chapter 5 (p.131).

**Chapter 12 – WHAT?** The chapter starts by explaining the process of analysis in and through storytelling, then moves on to provide a critically reflexive summary of my research processes and findings. In this section, I analyse the way I problematised young people's relationship with nature; reflect on my role in the situation, what I was trying to achieve and the actions I took. Within this, I consider the response of others and the consequences - for others, myself and for the study. Creating a reflexive meta-narrative demonstrates the relational nature of my research, and is congruent with Bazerman's (1995) quote used at the start of my thesis. I have called on all the voices I have heard and combined them to make an overall statement. The final section of this chapter provides a restatement of my research questions, addressed through analysis and interpretation of the papers from Part Two.

**Chapter 13 – SO WHAT?** This chapter discusses the key influences/drivers underpinning my study, and explores in an academic and practical manner, the approach I have used to creatively interpret and analyse findings. It includes a critique of my methodology, and evaluates this study as an example of transdisciplinary qualitative research. I explore what I brought to the study and

evaluate the other options I could have taken. The chapter concludes by identifying my new understanding of this subject, addressing the question of whether I have answered my research questions, and stating my contributions to knowledge.

**Chapter 14 – NOW WHAT?** This chapter considers the question of ‘What next for people supporting young people with/in nature?’, along with a methodological ‘What next’ for using storied and conversational approaches. This chapter brings the study to a close, with ideas for continuing the conversation, and an introduction to my post-doctoral plans.

## **Chapter 12 – What have I learned?**

In this section, I analyse and critically reflect on what I have learned from conducting this creative exploration of young people's relationship with nature. This chapter pulls all the threads together, based on the themes identified in Part One and discussed in Part Two to specifically address the aims/outcomes stated in my introduction. I consider the projects and participants within my empirical study and provide a concise discussion of the place and process(es) of analysis within a storied approach. I move on to summarise my research processes and findings, restate my research questions and analyse/interpret the papers from Part Two.

The three main projects included in my study were chosen primarily because the people responsible for them recognised me from my previous/other roles, and asked me to include them. My decision to agree to this opportunistic sampling was deliberate and purposeful, as the diverse locations enabled me to make this a multi-sited ethnography (Falzon, 2012) and gain a range of perspectives, from different settings with people who could be informative and able to answer my research questions. My methods provided me with the means to address my questions, to most effectively elicit the data I needed through the combination of participant observations, with informal and semi-formal interviewing. I feel that this has required insight and creativity to be able to gain understanding.

The process of analysing data has been continuous from day one, adding in new material as I encountered it, helping me to see my progress and evaluate how effectively I was addressing my research questions through an iterative process.

Listening to recordings, writing transcripts, listening again, (re)writing, organizing, (re)reading fieldnotes, (re)listening, making new links, opening new revelations, returning to the data – constantly ‘mulling it over’, dreaming about it, until I form a story which creatively interprets the data. This process is typical of a hermeneutic enquiry. Sometimes I have found it to be a quick process – I wake with a story already formed in my head (p.136); other times, it takes longer, the threads are there, but they appear jumbled, tangled and unclear. I listen to the words, to the texts, to what I am observing. I feel with the emotions aroused, and reflect on them. Then, once the story has formed, I share and test it through peer review (for me that involves practitioners, students and academics, as these comprise my peers). I question does the story appear lifelike, believable, credible? Does it have resonance and verisimilitude (see earlier, p.15-6)? Is it useful?

Placing my stories within theoretical categories in this thesis, provides a framework to identify themes that have emerged from my study: a mix of inductively developed theory and *a priori* theory (from prior experiences and reflections). The five core themes I identified are:

- Creativeness;
- Inclusiveness;
- Playfulness;
- Kindness;
- Responsiveness.

I will take each in turn, except for creativity which has been explored extensively elsewhere, particularly in Chapter 4, and briefly explain how they arose. I then relate them to the research question of how practitioners make sense of nature,

and show how this informed the development of the Practitioners' Toolkit. I have chosen to add 'ness' to each term in my thesis to emphasise that it refers to a specific *quality*, a characteristic or distinctive attribute (OEED, 2011) with the aim here of providing a focus, a lens through which to interpret the data. My paper focused on Inclusion (Chapter 7) was a response to a call for papers for a conference which had this theme, which meant that I looked at my data through this lens, and framed my discussion from this perspective. However, inclusion became a recurrent theme within my research.

My paper on Playfulness emerged from my fieldwork, and was something discussed by both practitioners and young people. For example, one of the practitioners told me: *"...playing is central really, I treat it as play myself, I like to play, and I play along with them, and guide them, to help them..."*.<sup>97</sup> I then spoke with some of the young people from this project who told me the practitioner was a *"Crazy lady – some of things she does, I had a packet of crisps, she was pretending to be a dog to get a crisp – but it didn't work."* And, *"She does some strange things, things you don't expect her to – a grown-up – might expect it from a five-year-old, but not from a grown-up woman."* They found her *"... enthusiastic, but a bit crazy – I ended up doing things I didn't think I would"*.<sup>98</sup>

My experiences of spending time with this project, talking with the people involved (young people, practitioners and managers) inveigled their way into the stories within 'The Tales of Tracy Hayes', particularly number 16: 'Hunting for Treasure'.

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<sup>97</sup> See p.79.

<sup>98</sup> See p.88.

This was the place where I found the inspiration for Boggarts. Linda, the project worker, took me for a walk along the beach, talking me through some of the activities and showing me where they occurred (see earlier, p.83). She was keen to show me a small pool on the edge of the narrow strip of woodland, where it merged into the beach. The water in the pool 'bubbles' with the tide, and some of the young people had been fascinated by it, playing in it with sticks and pretending it was magic. I had laughed, and named it a 'Boggarty Pool', somewhere which could be home to bog creatures. By the time I returned home, this had been transformed into a story about Boggarts.



**Image 11: The bubbling Boggarty Pool**

The paper on Responsiveness was initially prompted through reflections on a visit from my nephew, near the start of my study. Seeing how he responded to being outdoors, with people who were keen to share and nurture his experience, together with his open questioning of why some people did not respond, provoked me to explore this further. This ultimately resulted in Chapter 10 where it provided the

lens for understanding Lexi's story. However, responsiveness has been important in the other papers too, for example within Chapter 9, as the young people and I are seen responding to each other, and to the context, to the environment. Kindness is the other core theme, and the paper resulted from a request for a chapter to be included in an edited book on 'Young People and Care'. In the paper, I use kindness to explore caring for self, others and nature to emphasise the interconnectivity of nature, culture and family as an interwoven entity. Other supporting themes I discuss are comfort(ableness), belonging, gentleness, adventure and experiential learning – the need to keep experiences real and for young people to feel comfortable being outside. But none of these are distinct, separate themes: they are interwoven, relational and interconnected, and my choice to apply them this way is subjective.

As identified by Maxwell (2005), applying a connecting strategy to analysis/interpretation avoids breaking data into chunks/codes and maintains the focus on relationships between people, places, contexts and events. If I had chosen to use a more traditional form of thematic analysis, the coding process would have removed the contextual ties. In contrast, these are retained through a storied approach which enables building theory and applying it to a context. This is consistent with my theoretical, philosophical and conceptual framework (see pp.37-8). Story is the natural way that humans make sense of their world – and it is how we can make sense of our relationship both with nature, and with ourselves.

### **Analysis in storytelling**

My decision to include, within the body of my data, conversations (by email, as well as face to face), stories and anecdotes, in addition to excerpts from transcripts of interviews and observations, has influenced both the research process, and how it is presented (Ellis, 2004). As Reeves et al. (2008, p.513) explain, this informal approach enables ethnographers to ‘... to discuss, probe emerging issues, or ask questions about unusual events in a naturalistic manner... useful in eliciting highly candid accounts from individuals.’ They further highlight that this approach necessitates reflexivity and ethical consideration, and that data tends to emerge in an inductive, thematic manner. This is then presented ‘... in the form of a description of the ethnographer’s ideas and experiences, which can be used by readers to judge the possible impact of these influences on a study’ (Ibid., p.513). Therefore, I restate my argument from earlier (p.44): the stories created and shared within my study are more than mere ‘data artefacts’: they were created by *analysing* the data as I encountered it, and they form part of the wider data set. I also remind the reader of my earlier definition of data (see p.43) and I will analyse them here, within the context of the ‘whole story’.

When using a storied approach, it is vital the analytical methods are congruent with the methods of data elicitation. This means avoiding methods that process data by breaking it into pieces (codes) before synthesizing and aggregating it in alternative ways. Those methods may be useful for other topics of study, which require a less subjective/embodied/contextualised approach, but not for this study. In adopting this position, I am aware I am challenging academic expectations which favour more



usual (traditional) methods, such as thematic or discourse analysis, and I do so with care. I call primarily on the work of Carolyn Ellis to demonstrate and justify this form of analysis within a storied (storytelling) approach.

Ellis (2004) reminds us, that a decade before, Bochner suggested we use the term 'alterative' in preference to 'experimental' or 'alternative', as it shows we mean '... to change the traditional ways of doing research' (1994, as discussed in Ellis, Ibid., p.194). This makes sense to me: as also highlighted by Hughes-Games (one of many concerned environmentalists) the traditional ways of researching and reporting the human-nature relationship (dis/connection) are not working. People are not listening, they are not hearing our messages, or sharing our concerns.<sup>99</sup> And we need to listen to them to understand why this is so. We need to find different, *alterative* ways to respond to concerns about nature, ways which bring about change. We also need to remember that 'fantasy should be balanced by reality' (Hughes-Games, 2017, non-paginated).

I agree with Margot Ely (in Ely et al., 1997, p.1) that the '... key for qualitative research writers is to breathe into our words the life we have experienced.' Choosing what to include in reports of my work has not been easy. For example, when does a moment become a magic one, when does an anecdote become more of a story, how do I choose which form to use to capture and explicate an event/conversation/observation? I have addressed much of this already, and I will

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<sup>99</sup> For a prominent example of the need to find new ways to respond see:  
<http://www.wearefuterra.com/work/wild-team/>

critique it further in the next chapter as I apply Sarah J. Tracy's criteria to my methodological approach. Ely et al. (Ibid., p.66) explain every researcher '...has one story or even several that burn to be told', even when initially we may not be sure where/when they will fit within our retelling process (thesis and/or presentations). They assert (Ibid., p.67) we recognise these moments because '...they resonate for you: you're taken by it; you talk to yourself about it. Dream it.' I have found this to be true for me.

My magic moments are the encounters (after McCoy, 2012) which haunt me, trouble me and cause me to really question what I think is happening, how and why. The most haunting ones are those I write up into more of a story by adding contextual details and identifying points of critical analysis, as exemplified by the papers in Part Two. In contrast, anecdotes allow me to quickly move from scene to scene, building a bigger picture; as Ely et al (op. cit., p.69) argue, anecdotes are '...intimately tied into the research presentation by how they function... Anecdotes are higher levels of discourse'. We can use these to enliven an account, add interest and provide a focus to find meaning. They can form part of a bigger story.

### **Weaving the threads together through analysis and interpretation**

My analysis includes identification of key themes and ideas that emerged, weaving them together and interpreting them in a process of critical evaluation. Ely et al. (op. cit., p.223) explain that as interpreters '...we could be likened to filters through which we sift data in the process of making meaning'. The filtering process involves reflecting on what I have found, comparing it with other studies and relevant

theoretical literature, before deciding what to include/exclude. There are choices to be made, for example, which stories to tell, which to leave until another day. This is an active process of writing to discover what it is I am doing, what it is I am saying, rewriting, rethinking, finding meaning, clarifying understanding. This is all part of writing as a method of inquiry and I am aware each time I (re)listen to an interview recording, (re)read a transcript, (re)view entries in my field notebook, I (re)interpret the data. I find something new, different, another point of interest.

At times, my learning has felt like a process of unending questions and aporetic moments, whereby I have become, what Loewen (2005) refers to as walking aporia. When I started my study, I was not aware of how much critical realism informed my approach. I had no idea about hermeneutics, and very little understanding of ontology and epistemology. More than that, I had a distinct aversion to complex academic language and a preference for everyday language. This has changed: I have changed (as explored in Chapters 4 and 5). I now understand there needs to be a critical process which questions the frameworks and methods used, and this is an academic process, demanding suitably academic language. However, I have an even stronger commitment to making my work accessible, as advised by Canter and Fairbairn (2006), and I do so by taking time to explain each term, and to consider if it is strictly necessary for the audience concerned. Leavy (2016a) also asserts the importance of this, if we are making a genuine attempt to understand and 'illuminate' other people's lives. As an example of how I address the contradiction of stating this: whilst describing myself to an academic audience as 'Walking Aporia', I also named my prototype Adventure Bear 'Aporia' and explain that he is

easily confused, tends to walk around in circles and become lost (see earlier, Chapter 5, p.139).

Story is about more than a sequence of events, it is also about the intended audience and the storyteller (Witherell and Noddings, 1991). As asserted by Witherell and Noddings (Ibid.:1) stories ‘...attach us to others and to our own histories by providing a tapestry rich with threads of time, place and character...’. To understand some of the methodological decisions I have taken, which have impacted on the development of my study, it is important to reflect on my own position at the start of my study, and to understand how this has changed *because* of the study. At the start, I was determined to find out more about young people’s experiences outside, so that I could practice and teach from a more informed perspective. To do this, I took the decision to step away from my role of Training Manager of a Youth Work charity, and move nearly 200 miles north, to live and work in a county where I was unknown, with the aim of having a clearer, more objective view of the subject.

I have reflected on my research experiences, from the early planning stages, to this final stage, and this process is summarised within a collection of anecdotes capturing important conversations. It is written from the philosophical viewpoint of reflective practice, and as advocated by Andrew Sparkes (2007, p.540) this collection ‘...simply asks for your consideration’. I present eight here, to be

considered along with the two anecdotes from earlier (pp.6-7; p.24).<sup>100</sup> There was nothing particularly *momentous* about any of these conversations, in the conventional use of the word. However, taken together they have proved significant to me as I have conducted my research (see summary in Figure 2, p.36). I am sharing them with you here, to show how the use of anecdotal stories can be an effective way of summarizing the processes involved in challenging/developing our existing thinking and practice. Each one presents a Moment of Consideration. As advocated by Sparkes (Ibid.), they do this without lingering on methodology or theoretical concepts, instead, leaving it open to the reader's interpretation. They offer a snapshot into the life I have lived (Kafar and Ellis, 2014) as I have conducted my research. In the next chapter (pp.291-302), I will explore them further to evaluate the quality of my research, by utilising Sarah J. Tracy's (2013) criteria (discussed earlier, p.16) which are: (1) worthy topic; (2) rich rigor; (3) sincerity; (4) credibility; (5) resonance; (6) significant contribution; (7) ethical and (8) meaningful coherence.

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### **My tale of research anecdotes <sup>101</sup>**

#### ***Anecdote 3: Conversation with a critical friend, a professor of education, London (we're accompanied by my husband)***

Her: How's your PhD proposal coming along?

Me: Not too well. I nearly got a funded place, had an interview, but guess they could tell I really wanted to use my own question, rather than theirs. Maybe it's time to give up and concentrate on work.

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<sup>100</sup> The two earlier anecdotes captured my struggles with defining nature and the paradigm shift of moving from dis/connected to nature, to seeing it as a relationship with nature.

<sup>101</sup> These were unplanned conversations, and were not recorded/transcribed. They are presented here with as much accuracy as my memory and reflections from my field notebook allow.

Her: No, your study is too important, this topic needs to be addressed, and you're the person to do it.

Me (laughing): How can you tell? You've not known me very long.

Her: You have the experience, the knowledge, you have the passion and determination. (Turning to my husband): You must not let her give up!

Me: Perhaps I'll give it one more try, see if I can find the right place, the right people to support me ...

[She provides a supporting reference for my successful application to Cumbria, we sell our house/move/buy something smaller and we fund my studies until I am employed by the university]

***Anecdote 4: Conversation in the campus kitchen with a more experienced PhD student***

Him: Your study sounds interesting. What methodology are you using?

Me: Not sure yet, something qualitative though.

Him: What's your epistemology, your ontological perspective? What's your philosophical approach?

Me (laughing): Err... Tracy's? I'm guessing it doesn't work like that...

Him: No, those are the first things you need to sort.

[I buy lots of books on methodology and attend doctoral research training sessions]

***Anecdote 5: Conversation with a practitioner friend***

Her: You've finally started your PhD? Great, and what is it you're doing?

Me: Well, I thought I was exploring young people's connection with nature, exploring sensory, spiritual and emotional connections, looking to be more effective in practice. However, I no longer know what 'effective' means, and it seems I'm just studying 'ologies'... And to cap it off, it seems that being disconnected means you're scared of sheep...

[We both laugh. I write up my challenges in story form and talk about them at conferences]

***Anecdote 6: Conversation at researcher development workshop with the Head of Graduate School***

Me: I just don't like using those long words, they seem too elitist and exclusive – I want my work to be relevant to practice, to everyday life, to be understood by practitioners and families...

Her: You need to show your academic ability, to meet the academic criteria expected at this level.

Me: I want to write stories ...

Her (gently laying a hand on my arm): Perhaps you should write a book of children's stories, alongside your thesis.

Me: I meant for grown-ups, fables like Rachel Carson, not stories for children. As if I'm going to have time to do extra ...

[She lends me some storybooks, written by academics, and a member of my supervisory team signs me up to an online course on writing for children]

***Anecdote 7: Conversation with a colleague whilst preparing to attend a training course***

Her: I loved that course – I did it a few years ago. Do you still have to take a 'gift' of an activity to share?

Me: Yes. I'm going to make teddy bears, and invite people to take them on an adventure outside, the venue has lovely gardens to play in. We can come back together and share stories of our experiences, then I can relate this to how young people may make sense of nature.

Her: Oh no, not teddies, that's so childish. They'll be professionals. They'll be expecting something grown up. Best think again.

Me: Oh. I don't know what to do now ...

[I do something else, which is not effective, and it proves to be a pivotal and transformative moment. I vow in future to listen to my instinct and not be so easily deterred by others]<sup>102</sup>

***Anecdote 8: Conversation at a conference with a participant from my presentation titled: Methodological Mud-wrestling***

Him: Your research sounds interesting, tell me more.

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<sup>102</sup> See Chapter 5, pp.138-9.

Me: Well, I'm doing a qualitative study, informed by a philosophy of critical realism, with an interpretive epistemology, drawing from action research, because I want it to have a practical application, and I'm taking a narrative approach, writing stories...

Him (making a swatting movement with his hand): Oh, I get your methodology, you've already explained that. It's your QUESTION I find interesting. Don't let the methodology get in your way... nature, an interesting concept, and such a 'questionable thing', don't you think?

[I put the books aside and spend time with young people outside]

***Anecdote 9: Conversation with another PhD student, about being creative and playful***

Her: I've started painting, making felt pictures, and patchwork bags. I'm having an exhibition of artwork related to my PhD.

Me: I've started sewing bears, who like to have adventures – they can get muddy and be washed. I've made a set of 4 to take to an international conference in London...

[We agree it's good to be creative. I buy three bags from her, and give her a bear as a present – we joke that one day we'll collaborate and make 'bears in bags']

***Anecdote 10: Conversation with research mentor and a colleague from another university, whilst walking to a train station following a research meeting***

Her: Your work sounds very different, you have an unusual approach, you're very brave, challenging academic conventions like that.

Him: Challenging's the right word, you should have met her when she started – she was spitting challenges everywhere!

Me: Was I? Really? I've never seen it like that, it's just I didn't know what a PhD was, I had so much to learn. I still have ...

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## **Restatement of Research Aims and Research Questions**

### **How do I make sense of nature?**

Throughout my thesis, I have argued a one size fits all adventurous approach to Outdoor Education does not work, we need to allow space and time (and comfort) for a more diverse population to participate in genuine, meaningful experiences. We need to encourage people to develop confidence and take their own footsteps, not just to follow in ours: their way may be better. As identified earlier (Chapter 7, p.154), environmental crises may be seen as symptomatic of wider societal issues, such as power differentials and '... unequal distribution of resources' (Stevenson, 2007, p.142). And, if we accept Noddings' argument that we learn to care through watching and modelling the caring practices of others, combined with opportunities to '...have supervised practice in caring' (2013, p.xviii) then it becomes even more important to consider our own practices, and how these may inform the actions of others.

By reflecting on my experiences, I aimed to gain an awareness and understanding of my relationship with nature, with the specific purpose of enabling me to understand how this may impact on the way I work (in practice) and how I conduct and present research. What happened was much more profound: it was personally and professionally transforming (see Chapters 4 and 5). Volpe (2016) in an online exposition of approaches to dealing with the pain and sorrow of bereavement, highlights that:

A story, in order to be told, needs a narrator with a point of view who offers a perspective on what happened. But you can't narrate if you don't know who you are [...] Plotting out the story restores the narrator and the

narrative. Then, you can begin to imagine a new story, a new plot for yourself.

The 'gap in knowledge' which I identified at the start of my study became an innovative and creative space (Ellis, 2004) – to which I brought meaning, transforming it into a place. Becoming conscious of my own perspectives through critical reflexivity, is fundamental to ethnography (Reed-Danahay, 1997) and has had important consequences for my research design, and I further agree with Maxwell (2005, p.xii) '... research design, like most things, is best learned by doing it.' What can be seen from my papers (Part Two), together with my collection of anecdotes is my account of this process. You see me responding to the contextual factors, reflecting on conversations and refining my approach. This was a reflexive process of eliciting and interpreting data, developing and sharing (presenting) my theories, simultaneously interacting<sup>103</sup> and helping me to refocus my research questions. Reflexive writing is defined by De Freitas (2007, p.1, in Leavy, 2016b) as a method which allows us to trace '...the presence of the author in/through the text.' This is not a linear process, it is systemic, fluid and dynamic. It is based on accepting that qualitative researchers shape every part of their study, '...imbuing it with meaning and marking it with their fingerprint' (Leavy, 2016b, p.21). I am emerging from this study with a greater awareness of myself, my approach to life and the way that this influences how I make sense of nature.

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<sup>103</sup> Again, like Maxwell, I use the term 'interactive' to highlight the relational nature of this process.

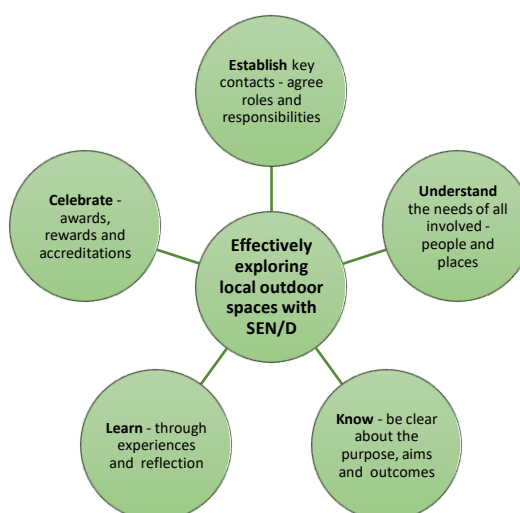
There are implications from this learning for other practitioners, which I have addressed within the Toolkit (see sections 1 and 2). In this practitioners' guide, I argue that '... to be effective we are looking to provide experiences that are meaningful, relevant and inspiring. Most of all they should be enjoyable and fun! We want young people to feel comfortable and be safe whilst exploring outdoors, so that they will want to continue going out'. The guide provides a starting point and offers suggestions for further supportive information – but this needs to be contextualised.

### **How do practitioners make sense of nature?**

By exploring practitioners' relationships with nature, I aimed to understand how this may impact on the way they work with young people. This had the specific purpose of enabling me to provide guidance for practitioners, to enable them to more effectively engage with young people in the natural environment. Critical reflexivity generates self-awareness, allowing us to understand why we choose to do certain things and make career choices – this is integral to working effectively. There were different ways practitioners made sense of nature – some used it in a background way, as a space for learning activities to occur (self-development); others foreground it, as the focus of activities (conservation education). What I found was they all worked from a young person-centred perspective; the practitioners I spent time with were highly trained and experienced, so this is not unexpected. I have several untold stories which I plan to explore from a practitioner perspective, at a later date. They have been incorporated into my other stories (see *The Tales of Tracy Hayes*) through blended creative (non)fiction, which shows them

interacting with young people. The main ways which I identified as forming part of effective practice, became the themes used to title some of the chapters in Part Two: Creativeness; Inclusiveness; Playfulness; Kindness and Responsiveness. Interaction is intrinsically embedded within these, and a key feature of my research approach. These were qualities demonstrated by the practitioners (and some of the young people) I encountered within my research and informed the development of the Practitioner's Toolkit.

The toolkit provides guidance for practitioners in how to support young people with SEN/D to enjoy public outdoor spaces. I developed a model which can be used at three key stages of the process of effectively exploring outdoors with SEN/D: (1) Before going outdoors; (2) Being outdoors; (3) After coming in from outdoors.



**Figure 5: A model to guide the process of effectively exploring local outdoor spaces with young people who have SEN/D**

Although explicitly designed to provide guidance for supporting young people with SEN/D, the toolkit is transferable to other groups of people, of differing ages and

abilities. My research showed many young people (especially those with SEN/D), were reluctant to explore outdoors alone, fearing misunderstanding and intimidation from other, unknown people. This makes it even more important to think carefully about the process of getting young people involved with their local outdoor places. It was launched within a workshop (see Appendix iii) and was well received, and it was widely distributed by the organisation. But the project I was involved in has now ended and there is no process for recording how it is being used. This restricts my ability to track its impact and influence for practitioners and young people (see p.237). However, I have been given permission to make it available to download from my website, to disseminate it by email and to use it within my work. This ensures a certain level of continuance and legacy.

### **How do young people make sense of nature?**

Through addressing this question, I aimed to understand young people's relationships with nature, and how this may impact on their perception of their health and well-being, and on their desire (or otherwise) to help conserve the natural environment. This had the specific purpose of enabling me to adopt a young-person centred approach to both conducting my research, and to the outputs developed from it. I started from the position of a concerned practitioner, looking for a more theoretical and research-informed perspective, to help me to develop practical ways to address young people's disconnection from nature. I was firmly committed to enabling young people to have a 'voice' on this topic. My initial methodology was driven by this. I wanted to elicit and share young people's stories on their experiences within, and with, nature. This changed in fundamental and

profound ways as I started conducting my fieldwork, and explored the various methodologies which may be most effective for this specific study. I refer to the processes in this early phase as ‘Methodological Mudwrestling’, which I interpreted in storied form and shared within oral presentations (for example, see: Appendix ii).

My initial aim was to inform practice around supporting young people to experience outdoor environments, and less ‘deliberately’ (especially at the start), to inform academic practice. I wanted to understand more clearly. I felt driven to explore the topic – to see how we could be more effective in our roles as facilitators. I had not expected to find the word ‘effective’ to be so problematic. I have taken care to explore that concept and to explain it within the practitioner toolkit. However, what I have found is more concerning than the ‘problem of disconnected children and young people’; my study has emphasised to me the very real threat of mass loss of nature,<sup>104</sup> which goes far beyond my initial position. It has left me questioning why more people are not concerned, particularly those in positions of power and authority. Why won’t they listen? Why don’t they respond? Don’t they see it happening? Don’t they care? Jack,<sup>105</sup> one of the young participants who I interviewed, shared his thoughts on this with me:

“I feel that over the next few years more people are going to realise just what is out there, because of the state of the world, and global warming [...] if we don’t look after what we’ve got we’re going to lose it.”

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<sup>104</sup> The Living Planet report, produced by conservation charity WWF and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) estimates that the current rate of extinction is about 100 times faster than is considered normal – greater than during some of the previous five mass extinctions in the Earth’s history. For more information see

[http://www.panda.org/about\\_our\\_earth/all\\_publications/lpr\\_2016/](http://www.panda.org/about_our_earth/all_publications/lpr_2016/)

<sup>105</sup> Pseudonym for young person.

In contrast to Jack, many young people I spent time with, both in the years leading up to the start of my doctoral work, and during it, professed to not ‘caring about nature’. It would be fair to say, they may not have thought about it, or noticed it, until someone like me started asking them questions, as in the case of Lexi and Liz in Chapters 9 and 10. With both young people, you can see that their outdoor experiences have helped them to feel better about their mental health (Randerson, 2007, discussed in Chapter 1, p.26). Eliasoph and Lichterman (1999, p.229) highlight that in general,

‘People do not say, “I can’t make a difference but I do care.” Instead, they typically say, “I don’t care.” In other words, it’s “not a problem.” And how people can talk about their own action is itself, a crucial part of action. People can’t change anything until they consider it a problem’.

My research problematised young people’s relationship to nature, to explore if they did care, and to identify ways we could develop/nurture this so that caring-about become more active caring-for (Chapter 9). I want to do more than simply interpret the world, I want to be more effective in taking action to conserve and protect it. This intent provided the impetus for my research and continues into my post-doctoral plans.

As identified within my stories, when we experience nature, culture and family as *an interwoven entity*, the connections and attachments we make can be very strong and meaningful.<sup>106</sup> These are connections we make with each other and those we make with nature. However, not all children and young people have the same

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<sup>106</sup> Derr, V. (2002) in Dunlap, J and Kellert, S.R. Eds. (2012) *Companions in Wonder: Children and Adults Exploring Nature Together*, London: The MIT Press

access to nature, or the same support to begin to know and understand it. We cannot expect people, whatever their age, to feel connected to something they have not yet experienced, or have experienced only in a negative way. So, we need to take that into consideration when designing activities for them, avoid the temptation to provide 'off-the-shelf', commodified activities and remember Lexi's admonition: "*only if they want to, it's everyone's choice*" (Chapter 10, p.234).

My approach to writing is to show how '...participants make sense of what has happened (...), and how this has perspective informs their actions, rather than in determining *precisely* what happened or what they did...' (Maxwell, 2005, p.74; my emphasis added in italics). Furthermore, my specific interest is in how the experience is organised and communicated: whether the participants are telling the 'truth' is less important, than the way they construct it – the narrative they (and I) choose to tell. Czarniawska (2004) explains this involves two perspectives: seeing *narrative* as a mode of knowing, and seeing *narration* as a mode of communication. I argue that there is a third perspective, seeing the *narrator* as the link between the two. My use of 'how questions' is further evidence of my realist stance, as it maintains focus on developing understanding, and allows me to suggest causality, without attempting to quantify or measure the variance. This approach has meant I have concentrated on asking questions about the meaning of events/activities to those involved, considered the influence of the context, both physical and social, the processes involved and how this informs their actions. This strong link between meanings in context and actions is more fully explored in the chapters in Part Two.



Returning to my research questions, I reflect on what it was I wanted to understand about young people's relationship with nature. I went in with an open-mind, with three over-arching and relatively loosely defined research questions, with the aim of gaining a range of perspectives on the topic, viewed through different lenses (Brookfield, 1995). This was a useful way of framing my study, providing specific focus on elements, which guided the development of my methodology, and it has been an evolutionary process, culminating in this thesis. I can confidently answer my research questions in a particularistic way (after Maxwell, 2005). I can explain how the young people and practitioners I have spent time with appeared to make sense of their experiences, from my observations and our conversations. I can explain and justify how I subsequently interpreted and made sense of that, through analysis with academic literature. I can even apply evaluator criteria to assess the quality of my work, to help me decide if it is ready for the examination that is integral to the doctoral process. However, my findings will only ever be partial and subjective, that is the nature of this type of study. Where I have generalized this to the key themes/topics within the papers in Part Two, I have done so with great care.

Analysing my methods, and my inclusion of 'trivia' (see p.62 and p.298), I agree with Maxwell (2005, p.79) that when considering data for a study like this, there '...is no such thing as inadmissible evidence in trying to understand the issues or situations you are studying'. This is reinforced by Thomson (2016, non-paginated) who reminds us, 'Data is created when you actually sit down, back in the office, away from the everyday busyness of field work, to work out what you have that will actually help you answer your research question(s) (...) In a very real sense, the

researcher creates the data'. It is important to consider the ethics of this, to respect the privacy, confidentiality and safety (emotional as well as physical) of participants and researcher (Kafar and Ellis, 2014). I aimed for a democratic relationship with participants, which meant on occasions, within interviews, our roles became reversed as they interviewed me about what I was trying to achieve – and what I was going to do with my new-found knowledge. I provide an excerpt from an interview transcript to exemplify this:

**Conversation with Jack<sup>107</sup>**

Me: have you got any questions you'd like to ask me?

Him: No...not really. Oh wait, there's one. What's your ambition?

Me: What's my ambition?

Him: Yes, what's your ambition with all this? Is there something that you're trying to change or is there something that you want to be involved in, that's higher level?

Me: I'm not entirely sure of all of it. Errmm...my ambition is to get a better understanding of it. Particularly from young people, which is why I am talking to young people, because I've been involved in this big debate about how do we train people up to work with young people outside, and how do we care for the environment, and I've been involved with both sectors, and I've heard a lot from adults talking about young people being disconnected from nature, and it being a problem that young people aren't outside. What I haven't heard is from young people, about actually, how they feel about this.

Him: uh huh...

Me: It's their opinion. So, my main ambition is to get that from this.

Him: Oh ok...

Me: So, that when somebody, some other adult starts talking about this, I can say, well no actually, this is what young people say. I can join in from the young person's side.

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<sup>107</sup> This is the same young person as anecdote 2 (see p.23).

Him: So do you see yourself as becoming a specialist? In this particular field, and using that knowledge to take to other places to train other people in that environment?

Me: Yes. What I see myself doing is I want to be a specialist in working with young people in environmental places, so, like we've been to...

Him: Ok, uh huh...

Me: I'm not an activity specialist

Him: Ok...

Me: where I see myself as a specialist is in how we can develop a relationship with nature, where young people feel that they want to be outside and that they enjoy it when they're out there.

Him: Maybe like, I don't know, an environmental psychologist perhaps?

Me (laughing): Wooah, that sounds really grown up [both laugh]

Him: Yes, it does, doesn't it?

Me: I suppose at some point I've got to, haven't I? Yeah, well we'll see how it goes.

Him: Oh ok, cool...

Me: That was a really interesting question, you really put me on the spot there. Thank you very much.

Contemplating my role within my study, as elucidated by Maxwell (2005, p.79) as a participant observer I have been a research instrument, my 'eyes and ears are the tools...' that I use to make sense of what is going on. Reflecting on the above anecdote, it becomes apparent the research has also constructed me, the 'expert', the researcher, just as much as I have constructed meaning from the research.

In addition to the more formal methods of interviews, transcripts, reports and field notes, I also gather information through casual conversations, chats, incidental observations, anecdotes, memories and reflections. A socio-narrative approach using stories, provided the necessary flexibility to allow for emergent insights to refine my methods, enabling me to response to context and most importantly, to

the participants. Implicit within this is my belief, my conviction, that story is the way we make sense of the world. Anecdotes focus on a single event, and as Thomson (2016) asserts, anecdotal evidence is important, it should not be dismissed as 'merely', or irrelevant. It is arguably the most natural, everyday way we capture and share information. Even if, at times, the anecdotes appear fragmentary, limited or incoherent with regard to the research question, they represent building blocks alongside the other methods. They help to build the overall story.

When I reflect on the research relations established with those I have studied - the way I have carefully selected the projects, the sites, the participants, the young-person-centredness, the ways I have chosen to collect and analyse data - I can see the importance of story. It is a golden thread weaving throughout. Some decisions I have taken were conscious, planned, and methodical; others were more instinctive and intuitive – in response to my encounters. There are inherent philosophical, ethical and political issues within these decisions. It is crucial to remember that what to me is a research project, may be perceived as an intrusion into the lives of others. Consideration, care and kindness are vital.

## **Chapter 13 – So What?**

This chapter critiques my methodology, whilst discussing the key influences/drivers underpinning my study. I also explore my approach to creatively interpreting and analysing research findings and state how this is useful to the wider world - what is my influence and contribution to knowledge? My research aimed to develop an understanding of young people's relationship with nature, by exploring three individual strands, each with their own specific research question, taking a different perspective to the topic (see p.18 and p.39). This had the specific purpose of enabling me to develop a holistic understanding of young people's relationship with nature. I will take each strand in turn as I consider how these have been addressed, and then explore the challenges and limitations of the study. The chapter ends by addressing the question of whether I have filled the gap identified at the start of my project (pp.26-7).

### **Critiquing my conceptual framework**

Throughout my study, I have referred to my work as interdisciplinary, as a way of bridging the gap between natural and social studies by drawing from literature from a wide range of disciplines. However, as I started reflecting on and critiquing my approach I realised I have gone beyond this, and I became conscious of the *transdisciplinary* nature of my work. There is no clear definition of transdisciplinary research, or of how it can be evaluated (see for example, Wickson et al., 2006; Klein, 2008; Russell et al., 2008; Carew and Wickson, 2010; Leavy 2016a). Jahn et al. (2012) highlight that transdisciplinary research is not well established or effectively funded within universities or other researcher institutions. Thus, many researchers,

myself included, are not aware this is a label which can be attached to their work. Nor are they aware of how useful this label can be for research which has a moral or a social justice basis. Leavy (2016a, p.24) explains transdisciplinarity ‘... has emerged in order to meet the promise of transcending disciplinary knowledge production in order to more effectively address real-world issues and problems’. She emphasises using this holistic approach enables us to more effectively understand and solve contemporary issues (problems) by placing the topic/issue at the centre of the process. However, she also reminds us that as researchers there is still an inherent obligation to create ‘... a methodologically sound research project’ (Ibid., p.26). Wickson et al (op. cit., p.1048) identify three key characteristics of transdisciplinary research as ‘problem focus, evolving methodology and collaboration’, all evidenced within my study.

Transdisciplinarity goes beyond involving academics (or literature) from different disciplines, to include practitioners and other, non-academic stakeholders. Leavy (2016a) cautions it is important to recognise that taking this approach does not necessitate abandoning individual disciplines; indeed, there need to be disciplines for transdisciplinarity to exist, as they provide the foundations, the building blocks for a methodological approach. I agree with this – one of the delights for me of conducting this study has been finding a place (a home) within Children’s Geographies (for exposition on this see *Tales of Tracy Hayes*). Using a consistent approach to the definition of key terms within this thesis (Chapter 1, p.4), as this is not an everyday term, it is not appropriate to use a dictionary for this term. Therefore, I have chosen to apply the definition given by Leavy (2016a, p.35) as it is

comprehensive, and is based on her extensive review of the history and diversity of this approach.

**Transdisciplinarity** – Leavy (Ibid.) asserts transdisciplinary projects tend towards a social justice oriented approach<sup>108</sup> as resources and expertise from multiple disciplines are integrated with the aim of holistically addressing a real-world issue or problem. Transdisciplinarity draws on knowledge from disciplines relevant to specific research issues or problems, while ultimately transcending disciplinary borders and building a synergistic conceptual and methodological framework which is irreducible to the sum of its constituent parts. Transdisciplinarity views knowledge-building and dissemination as a holistic process that requires innovation and flexibility.

Applying this definition to my research. My study has involved participants from marginalised (oppressed) groups, for example: young people in care; young people identified as at risk of exclusion from school; young parents; young people not in education, employment or training; young people accessing targeted support due to issues within their families; young people with SEN/D or PMLD (for definition of these terms, see p.54). My papers have aimed to expose and explore the socially constructed characteristics of these inequalities, through the lenses of my identified themes. The real-world issue which has driven my work has been a complex, multi-faceted one, requiring an equally complex, multi-faceted methodological approach. As Leavy (2016a) reminds us, social research is a process aimed at knowledge-

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<sup>108</sup> This is a contested claim, as some transdisciplinary researchers do not highlight social justice as a focus for their work, whilst others do.

building and meaning-making. I have been seeking knowledge of how we can work more effectively with young people, so that we can more effectively conserve the natural environment. I have formulated questions from differing perspectives to get at this *desired* knowledge. This has involved collaborations with a range of stakeholders, including young people; practitioners; managers; researchers – and for my MA research, funding bodies.

### **Evaluating the quality of my qualitative study**

To evaluate the quality of my qualitative study, I have used Sarah J. Tracy's (2013) 'Eight "big-tent" criteria for excellent qualitative research', which I discussed earlier (Chapter 1, p.16). Each criterion forms a sub-section of this chapter, and I address them in the order in which they appear within her framework, applying this to analyse and interpret the preceding chapters.

#### **(1) Worthy Topic**

Kurzman (in Buroway et al., 1991, p.250) highlights '...knowledge is swayed by the interests of the knowers. This is one of the foundations of the sociology of knowledge...'. We cannot ignore the influence of our values and interests, on the way we conduct research, analyse our findings, nor in the ways in which we then communicate this to others. My research challenges taken for granted notions regarding young people's dis/connection with nature. First, by challenging the very nature of the debate, which is reframed through seeing it as a relationship, and secondly by refocusing it to a young-person centred approach. As can be seen from the preceding chapters and my 'Tale of Anecdotes', my research topic is relevant, timely and significant. The threat of climate change, anthropocentric damage to the



planet and loss of diversity are of pressing concern.<sup>109</sup> I have considered a range of different audiences, from a transdisciplinary perspective and endeavoured to present my findings in an interesting and accessible manner.

## **(2) Rich Rigour**

As highlighted throughout my thesis, my study draws from a wide range of theoretical constructs, which have been carefully applied to my experiences and observations from my time in the field. Formally this time is recognised as the four years of registered doctoral study; however, my reflexivity has made the most of the 45 years preceding this, taking a blended approach to life/work, as advocated by Ellis (2004/2014). My sample has been drawn from across England, and through conversations and literature review, has been compared to a range of international studies. With regard to data collection and analysis processes, Van Maanen urges ethnographers to ‘...continue experimenting with and reflecting on the ways social reality is presented’ (2011, pp.xiv-xv). He refers to this as ‘intellectual restlessness’, and highlights ‘...the distinction between literature and science in ethnography is shrinking ... newer voices are audible, new styles are visible, and new puzzles are being put forth’. As a researcher looking to be informed by both natural science and social science, whilst working within a practice-research-pedagogy nexus, this restlessness is something I recognise. Creating a blended methodology has enabled me to find new ways to address old problems (for example, the relationships we have with young people, and with nature) and to be intellectually daring. I

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<sup>109</sup> For more examples of the need to find new ways to respond see:  
<http://www.wearefuterra.com/work/wild-team/>

recommend this approach to other researchers. However, to be successful with it, to be judged to have made a substantial contribution to knowledge, this approach must involve scholarly caution, respect for process and academic rigour.

Analysis and interpretation has involved continual cross-checking of findings through presentations, reports, dialogue and reflection, as well as 'using literature to make sense out of the data; applying theory to the data; collaboration, discussion and negotiation with research partners and/or differently positioned stakeholders' (Van Maanen, *Ibid.*, p.79). Using a storied approach has enabled me to present my research findings in accessible formats and to reach both academic and non-academic audiences.

### **(3) Sincerity**

My study is characterised by self-reflexivity. I have been honest and open about my subjective values, biases and inclinations. I have been transparent about the methods used, and the challenges encountered, and this is addressed more fully later (challenges and limitations, p.302). Booker (2004/2016, p.568) explains that through the process of meaning-making, we define and categorise, with an innate tendency to '...divide everything into oppositions between one thing and another [...] We recognise our own identity in sensing our difference from the 'others'.' This means we see ourselves as different from the nonhuman world, a process which has contributed to our perceived separation from nature. My very early change in focus from dis/connection to relationship enabled me to embrace the shifting, dynamic, contextualised mutability of this. The strength of our relationship is

dependent on so many variables, notably social, cultural and political elements, as can be seen from the various encounters included in this thesis.

#### **(4) Credibility**

My research is marked by thick description, with concrete detail and explication of tacit (nontextual) knowledge as expected from an ethnographical approach (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). I have aimed for this to be based on showing rather than telling. As advocated by Tansley and Maftai (2015) in their critique of more traditional forms of reporting, where the emphasis is on telling others what we did, how we did it, what we found, and what they/we should do about it. An alternative (alterative) approach involves showing, being more open to interpretation, non-directive and arguably, more respectful. My use of magic moments shows when crystallization has occurred (see p.49) and my texts celebrate multivocality, and a layering of stories. It is an approach to be recommended for similar, contextualised research.<sup>110</sup>

I have checked the credibility and verisimilitude of my work, through honest discussions within my presentations and within my supervisory team (see pp.15-16; p.263).

#### **(5) Resonance**

I have been explicit throughout about my desire for this to be research which influences, affects, or moves readers/audiences through aesthetic, evocative representation and naturalistic generalisations. Using a storied approach has

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<sup>110</sup> This is a methodological finding from my research.

enabled me to present my research findings in accessible formats and to reach both academic and non-academic audiences. Creative writing is a genre of arts-based research, viewed as being on the methodological cutting-edge, whereby ‘... researchers are “carving” new practices and creating “new ways to see”,’ (Leavy 2009, p.254, in Leavy 2016a, p.110). This form of research respects alternative ways of interpretation and sense-making, de-privileges the academic, and I argue, is a more democratic process.

## **(6) Significant Contribution**

My research provides a contribution<sup>111</sup> conceptually/theoretically and practically as evidenced by the outputs listed in Appendix iv; the Practitioners’ Toolkit; the accompanying storybook, ‘The Tales of Tracy Hayes’, and the Adventure and Comfortable Bears.<sup>112</sup> However, with interpretive, transdisciplinary work it can be difficult to evidence impact and influence. To exemplify this, I cite evidence from my line manager and my research mentor.

**Line Manager** (2017): ‘Your work is *pervasive* <sup>113</sup> Tracy, it changes the way we do things. It is more about influence than impact... For example, the other day I found myself explaining to second year psychology students how to do auto/ethnography. I’ve never done that before. You’ve opened up a new approach to undergraduate research...’

**Research Mentor** (2015): ‘Boggarts featured at the conference yesterday. I sensed your presence!!’

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<sup>111</sup> It is not up to me to claim the significance of this contribution; I leave that to the reader to decide.

<sup>112</sup> See [www.makingsenseofnature.co.uk](http://www.makingsenseofnature.co.uk) for more information on these.

<sup>113</sup> She referred me to work by Arthur W. Frank to explain this term.

Addressing this challenge has provided a contribution to a conference, planned for summer 2017,<sup>114</sup> by offering a discussion forum in which many questions will be posed, including:

- Can we really claim narratives and storytelling are valid forms of research? What about being robust? How can we meaningfully evidence this?
- Are research projects in danger of attempting to measure the immeasurable?
- What does impact really mean, and who is 'impacted'?
- How do we want our research to be used, and who do we want to read/act on it?

The session will explore the apparent need to measure, quantify and statistically signify concepts which, as I have already argued, are better suited to interpretative practices (see earlier, Chapter 1, pp.25-6). We will discuss the contentious nature of the word 'impact' and propose that 'influence' is preferable for concepts which change with each situation, individual and environment.

To ensure my study does provide a recognisable and (hopefully) significant contribution, it has been important not to allow myself to get lost in the artistic, creative process, and to maintain focus on the issue, the problem to be solved. My personal goals were motivated by curiosity, desire to explore the topic; my practical goal was to accomplish an in-depth study, to make a practical contribution; my intellectual goal was focused on understanding, and offering alternative ways of looking at things. Gutkind reminds us '...the creative aspect of the creative

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<sup>114</sup> For more information on the seminar, see UL: <http://www.marjon.ac.uk/courses/our-faculties/faculty-of-education--social-sciences/eoe-conference/>

nonfiction experience should be utilised to make the *teaching element* – the nonfiction part of the product – more *provocative*’ (1997, p.69; my emphases in italics). I want my stories to be aesthetically pleasing, to be well-crafted and have artistic merit; however, more than that, I want them to be useful – to serve the purpose of provoking dialogue about this topic. They are more than simply a pleasing story. They have purpose, which extends beyond this study, beyond the academy, into practice and pedagogy. This has necessitated learning how to craft research stories, drawing from the techniques of creative nonfiction (for example, Gutkind, 1997).

The process involved in conducting this study has helped me to discover that, like Maxwell (2005, ix) I too have been ‘thinking realism, without being fully aware of it.’ This has been combined with a hermeneutical approach to life, in that I see the ‘questionableness’ of what others may take as a given; thus, I challenge what others accept. I recall a conversation with a student who I was supervising whilst on a fieldwork placement for an MA course, who asked me “Tracy, do you get splinters in your bum, from sitting on the fence?” This was reinforced later, by an academic colleague’s apparent frustration with my ‘it depends’ answer to a question he had asked within a discussion group, expecting (and indeed hoping for) polarised answers. He later admitted to me that he was conscious that it does depend, but he had wanted to generate an argument. I disagree with this approach: a discussion can be just as critical and informative if we start with the premise that the answer does depend and then explore the contextual factors.

My experience of everyday reality, the decisions I have taken (summarised within Decision Tree, p.36 and Tale of Anecdotes, pp.272-275), the choices I have made are unique to me, my identity. The situations and encounters cannot be replicated, however the way I went about this, my methodology, may be. Transdisciplinary, creative methods allow researchers to wander at the start, to explore their topic, to see where it takes them. We can then gradually develop the most appropriate and useful questions; seriously and systematically reflect on research design, respond and be flexible. My approach may be perceived as a challenge to the current research culture in society (favouring evidence-based practice) and in the academy (favouring fast-track impacts and outputs). I question why there is such an emphasis on speed, argument, debate and impact, and join with Julian Stern (2014) in calling for a shift towards slower, kinder, more gentle and exploratory methods, with an aim for influence rather than impact. This necessitates conscious avoidance of language associated with violence and war, in preference for more open and honest ways of communicating, which take account of our relative position of power – and openly discuss the challenges involved, and the ‘messiness’ of research (see earlier, p.42; pp.122-3; p.207; p.213; p.225). Choosing to value anecdotes and apparent trivia, the small things, seeing nothing as insignificant, enables us to take an empathic stance balanced by clarity of purpose. My experience of the doctoral process has enabled me to find the style with which I am ‘most comfortable’ (Ellis, 2004, p.199) and given me a ‘voice’, which I chose to use with care (see acknowledgements, p.ix).

However, this gentler, more careful, non-traditional approach makes it difficult to evidence the contribution of my work – how do I capture the ‘impact and influence’

of something which is not measurable? My answer to this is that as well as being pervasive, research can be persuasive, inspirational and influential (Simmons, 2006) and can affect change just as much as more traditionally impactful approaches. The slow is as important as the fast, the storied as important as the quantified.

## **(7) Ethical**

Throughout my research, I have been open about ethical and moral issues, which has involved taking account of procedural ethics, situational and culturally specific ethics and relational ethics. Within my papers, I have discussed the issues that emerged whilst I conducted my research, and how I responded to these. I agree with Thomson (2016, non-paginated) who argues ethics is not something which gets 'signed off' at the start of the study – ethical concerns are addressed continuously – in relation to the wording of the research questions, methodology, methods, analysis, interpretation, presentation of findings, choice of participants – *every* aspect of the study. She further emphasises,

'... it is pretty hard to separate out questions of analytic technique and writing craft from ethics. The decisions you make about how to analyse and how to write are not simply about the best process, the most robust, the most transparent, something transferable. They are also profoundly about the ways in which we think about what we are doing with people who have given us their time, thoughts and words.'<sup>115</sup>

And I agree with her, this is something to worry about. Critical reflexivity and a flexible approach have allowed me to address this worry, whilst concurrently being

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<sup>115</sup> Blog Post, 16<sup>th</sup> December 2016. URL: <https://patthomson.net/2016/12/12/an-ethics-of-analysis-and-writing/>



responsive to the environment and context of my study. To identify the ethical, methodological or practical issues I have encountered and paused to explore, I have adopted the term magic moments; this is a similar technique to Maxwell (2012) who uses the term 'memos'.

My approach to literature has been to maintain a young person-centred approach through non-prioritisation of academic or adult voices, and to use the literature in an actively critical, creative and at times, playful way. I have purposefully selected literature from an interdisciplinary perspective, and applied it to each specific element of study, to explore the themes as they emerged from my experiences. When constructing texts (stories, papers, presentations), I have been mindful of Richardson's caution that 'Language does not "reflect" social reality, but produces meaning, creates social reality' (2000, p.349). This typifies a critical realism philosophy (as identified within my conceptual framework) as it allows us to view an individual's meaning and ideas - their concepts, beliefs, feelings, intentions (after Maxwell, 2012) as real.

### **(8) Meaningful Coherence**

I believe my study does achieve what it purports to be about and uses methods and procedures that fit with my stated goals to provide coherent answers to my three research questions. I have meaningfully interconnected literature, research questions/foci, findings, and interpretations with each other. Action research was embedded within my fieldwork, as we reflected on the events of the day, and applied the learning to planning for the next sessions. This learning was ultimately

encapsulated in the practitioner toolkit. Combining action research, with hermeneutics enabled me to highlight that my study is contextual, relational and dialogical (see p.114). However, I have drawn most strongly from Ethnography, which is a highly useful methodology for addressing a range of research questions. It can generate rich and detailed accounts, and enables us to study social interactions, behaviours, and the perceptions which take place within settings (groups, organisations, communities). However, it is more than a method, it is a means of representation. Van Maanen (op. cit., p.4) describes it as the 'knot that binds' together fieldwork and culture, a way of making culture visible: an experientially driven, interpretive act.

Within my study, ethnography has allowed me to explicitly consider: 1) the people I was observing and to explore the relationship between their behaviour and the cultural context; (2) Me, my role and experiences as the observer/researcher; (3) the 'Tale', which is the term Van Maanen (Ibid.) uses to refer to the representational style selected to connect the observer and the observed. And lastly, (4) the audience, by considering the role of the reader, and aiming to make this an engaging process so the reader is 'engaged in the active reconstruction of the tale' (Ibid., p.1). The representational process of constructing images of others in textual form has inherently moral and ethical responsibilities. It is not a neutral process, it is politically mediated, it involves power. Therefore, we need to remain aware of the difference between how fieldwork is experienced in practice, and how it is interpreted and reported. Owing to the relationship the ethnographer shares

with research participants, reflexivity occupies a central element of this type of research.

Reflecting on my methodological choices, I feel they enabled me to achieve what I set out to, and my blended methodology of HEAR is typical of transdisciplinarity. It may be possible to replicate my study, by applying a similar methodology and applying Sarah J. Tracy's framework; however, the findings will be different. The findings are 'always experientially contingent and highly variable by setting and by person' (Van Maanen, 2011, p.4). For me, that is the appeal of this approach: I find it exciting, and I plan to continue to explore the significance of transdisciplinarity within contextual analysis.

### **Challenges and Limitations**

Undertaking a comprehensive and critical literature review has been particularly challenging due to the diverse disciplines included, however this is key to being effectively transdisciplinary (Leavy, 2016a). I addressed this by taking the methodological choice to allow this to be driven by practice, by my experiential learning. As findings emerged, these were explored through literature, rather than the other way around. This was a responsive, iterative and reflexive process. As Leavy asserts, 'Reflexivity is necessary in order to be able to "see" the big picture from multiple vantage points' (2016a, p.78). Wickson et al. (2006) also emphasised the importance of reflection, to enable the researcher to be conscious and aware of how our own '...frames of reference/values/beliefs/assumptions etc. have shaped the conceptualisation of the problem, as well as the development of the method of investigation and the solution' (Ibid., pp.1053-4). I have constantly questioned if I am just seeing what I want/expect to see, and not seeing, or worse, choosing to

ignore things I do not like or agree with (Bassot, 2016). I do not believe I have done this, and have openly admitted where I have been troubled or found the research 'messy'. It is challenging to balance this need for reflection, for an autobiographical stance, against the need to be perceived as a cutting-edge academic rather than a self-indulgent, egotistical, navel-gazer (Gutkind, 1997).

My shyness and initial lack of confidence, resulted in my tendency to withdraw, to isolate myself, and retreat into a shell (see Chapter 5) which I originally perceived as a weakness. However, this has enabled me to empathise with others who may do the same; it has helped to understand inclusion/exclusion, from a personal and intimate perspective. This has influenced my choice of participants (summarised in Decision Tree, p.36 and accompanying narrative). When I encounter something, which makes me instinctively want to withdraw/retreat, I now pause to question my response, to consider if I need to challenge it, behave differently. Because of this process, I am now able to present confidently in multiple disciplines.

Another challenge, which I really had not anticipated, was the danger of appearing naïve, childish or childlike – or conversely, being considered *brave* for the approaches I have taken. To me they make sense: if we want to understand the world of a child we need to get down to their level; with adolescents, we should remember how it felt when we were that age; we should use imagination and empathy, and active listening skills. And we need to be flexible and open to learning from the experiences of others. We should consider what it means to be a role model. I am reminded of a conversation with one of the practitioners who participated in my research, who reflected with me on some of the playful

experiences he had shared with young people. To exemplify, I share an extract from this interview:

... we must have played extreme levels of hide and seek at the weekend and it was actually really, really good and my competitive side was definitely coming out in that I was finding increasingly unique places to hide. But I think as well, it just meant that, you know, it's good fun to be, to play and to feel like a child again, to have a laugh. We were all hiding behind trees and the kids were like squashing me up against the tree to try and hide in behind you, and you were like pushing them out the way to get them to find another place.... it was really good fun and other things came out from it. It was also good in terms of relationships...young people were like come and hide with me here, here's a really good space you won't get caught here. I think it just added that extra element, you know we were doing something that was fun but together you know it's like we're trying not to get caught and stuff. So, in terms of relationships it was quite valuable

As my anecdotes, stories and papers show, this approach is not always easy, and it is open to misunderstandings. I am inspired by others' response to similar challenges, for example, the 'natural artist' Andy Goldsworthy:

It's tempting to think of him as a naive kind of artist, returning us to childhood communion with nature... he used to hate it when people referred to his work as childlike, or worse childish, believing himself to be a heroic conceptualist. 'I used to say, "Hey, I'm a grown-up and this is grown-up art." But since I have had my own children,' he has four, 'and seen how intensely a child looks at things, you really can't describe that looking as naive. My work is childlike in the sense that I am never satisfied to look at something and say that is just a pond or a tree or whatever. I want to touch it, get under the skin of it somehow, try and work out exactly what it is.'... But for me art has to be more than shock. I would rather subvert things, try to make people look at them differently (Adams, 2007; non-paginated).

Transdisciplinarity thrives on creativity, on looking at, and thinking about things in a different way, with the purpose of doing things differently. And maybe this does

mean transdisciplinaryians have to be brave. As Leavy (2016a, p.14) reminds us: ‘... the modern academy has been based on the creation and maintenance of disciplinary borders. Therefore, the recent growth in transdisciplinary approaches to research signifies a major turn in how social research is conceived and conducted.’ Being part of this movement, whilst concurrently establishing an academic identity, which is measured by quantifiable impact as part of the current audit culture, is not easy (Hayes, 2015b; for a more in-depth exposition of this, see McCoy, 2012; Sparkes, 2007).

The terminology within academia is still heavily influenced by traditional styles of writing. An example of this is the feedback I received for a poster presentation in which I explained the autoethnographical element of my work and reflected on my position within my project. It was short and to the point “*This poster should have used third person*”. More examples can be found within the advice which floods social media, providing guidance on academic writing, based on simple, easily replicable structures – resulting in formulaic writing, that I find boring to read (and write). I thought it was just me, being awkward and challenging, then discovered a host of like-minded academics, including Ellis, Bochner, Pelias, Richardson, Thomson, Sword, Horton, Kraftl, Fairbairn.<sup>116</sup>

We are working within a time where many people profess little respect for experts, particularly regarding environmental concerns and there is an awareness that people do not seem to be listening (discussed earlier, p.268). I have lost count of

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<sup>116</sup> Listed in Consolidated Bibliography.

the times I have been told I am brave, that my approach is risky, by other academics who have told me they would love to do what I do, but they are too afraid they will be perceived as non-academic. Is that so bad? If at the end of reading my work, the reader feels able to say, "*Tracy has a way of explaining things so I can understand them,*" then I am content (at this stage), that my approach has been effective.

### **Addressing the gap identified at the start of my project – has it been filled?**

How do young people (and other ages) make sense of nature? To answer this, it is necessary to consider how we/they encounter nature, through the recognisable processes of mediated, direct and indirect contact with nature – and how these are facilitated/accessed. As I have repeatedly argued, there is no 'one size fits all' or most effective approach: for most people, it is a complex blend of all three processes, with socio-cultural and political influences determining the nature of this relationship. And it is a fluid relationship,<sup>117</sup> like a river it ebbs and flows, gaining/losing significance within our lives, depending on what else is demanding our attention. For some people, at times within their lives, nature may go unnoticed: something that is just there, in the background; at other times, it provides a place of refuge, fun, adventure, solace, peace or escape. For me, it has been all these, at different times during this research project.

I have valued the many walks with my dogs, friends, family and research participants in and with nature, and have found special places (for example Image 11, p.265) where I have been able to process and make sense of my thoughts – to think about thinking (Nixon, 2013). But this is subjective: what works for me, may

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<sup>117</sup> See earlier discussion on relationship with nature on p.12; pp.24-5, and pp.84-85.

not work for you. As we are reminded by Lexi (Chapter 10) understanding the norms and values of participants is key to developing an understanding from their perspective (discussed within Chapter 11, Toolkit).

### **How might I be wrong?**

Whilst I am uncomfortable with the term 'validity' it encapsulates a concern that does need to be addressed. If we accept that there is no one 'truth', then is it possible to be wrong? This is a concern that has its roots in the relationship between my conclusions and 'reality'. Maxwell (2005, p.105) asserts that critical realism recognises validity as a problematic term, seeing it as a hang-over from '...early forms of positivism'. I prefer to apply the more everyday questions, "Why should you believe me? Why should you believe my stories?" To which I respond, "Is my study useful and believable?" and I turn to the Practitioners' toolkit for support. I cannot yet critique its application, as it has only recently been published. However, its development was informed by my research; it has been critiqued by practitioners within a CPD (continuing professional development) workshop and has been used within teaching sessions. Feedback so far has been positive (see report in Appendix iii). Certainly, the organisation which commissioned it feels that it has contributed something important to practitioner knowledge. I have been open and honest about my interpretations and subjectivity, and have invited alternative interpretations – part of my interactive approach. I recognise and value that we see things differently, that we have our own worldviews, and this has been apparent in my method from the start, even whilst developing my original proposal. My papers reflect the partial, complex and multi-faceted nature: my topic is not new, it is ages old. It is the way I approach it that is different, that is uniquely me.



## **Chapter 14 – Now What?**

This chapter considers the methodological ‘What next’ for using storied and conversational approaches, along with the key question of ‘What next for people supporting young people with/in nature?’. This brings the study to a close, with ideas for continuing the conversation, with an introduction to my post-doctoral plans.

### **Encouraging transdisciplinary, storied approaches**

This section paraphrases the call for papers issued for a conference session that I convened in September 2016, supported by a colleague from the University of Cumbria. This session had the explicit aim of encouraging discussion about using a storied, transdisciplinary approach. Transdisciplinarity enables us to focus on approaches that aim to capture people’s imagination and their attention – for example through stories, fables, poetry, song. As identified by Brady (2009, p.xv): ‘We are storytellers all, and poetry, an equally ancient part of that toolkit, is about all of us. It always has been. Many in the one, one in the many. The particular in the universal’. The more traditional scientific, often positivistic, approaches ‘...obscure the social, economic, political, cultural and ethical nature of the issues at hand. They obscure the role of people, behaviours, practices and institutions. And they limit which analyses and solutions are deemed possible and relevant’ (Connell, 2011 cited in UNESCO, 2013, p.50). I advocate for something different.

Nexus thinking, whether taken as a method or a metaphor, encourages us to work across disciplinary boundaries, to think relationally and to make connections across

time and space (RGS-IBG 2015). The key messages from the World Social Science Report (UNESCO, 2013, p.46; my emphasis added in bold) represent a call for ‘...a **new** kind of social science – one that is **bolder, better, bigger, different**’ – and further emphasise that there is an ever-increasing requirement for new ways of doing and thinking about science, to effectively address the interdisciplinary and cross-sector changes society faces. There is a need for transformative learning: as identified by Eyler and Giles (1999, p.133), ‘Transformational learning occurs as we struggle to solve a problem...we are called to question the validity of what we think we know or to critically examine the very premises of our perception of the problem’.

The call for action on environmental issues is not new (see for example, UNEP year book, 2017), and it is concerning that it is taking so long for people to listen and to respond. There appears to be a lack of understanding, and awareness, compounded by a feeling of disempowerment as to what can be done, which can lead to action paralysis (Jensen, 2002, p.330). This can be partially attributed to *how* the message is being communicated from scientists to the general public through a range of different media – something is being lost in translation, missed in more traditional interpretations. As Leavy (2016a, p.8) asserts, ‘Humanity is facing a host of very real and pressing problems ... if the research community is to seriously engage with the major issues and problems of our time, we need to pool our resources in the service of addressing complex contemporary problems. Transdisciplinarity provides a pathway’. I agree with her, and further argue that more creative approaches can bring about this transformative learning, through personally meaningful

experiences that foster positive relationships. Creative processes can be used ‘... both as tools of discovery and a unique mode of reporting research’ (Brady, 2009, p.xiii), enabling us to explore, gather/elicit and interpret in a more holistic and empathically connected way (McCulliss, 2013). However, these are not separate processes, they are symbiotically intertwined: creative, transdisciplinary methods can make visible the geographical, social, cultural, political, moral and ethical nature of these issues.

### **Concluding thoughts**

At the very start of my thesis, I acknowledged the ‘...many voices, which the writer brings together in a conversation’ (Bazerman, 1995, p.89). My written thesis has included numerous voices, captured within quotations, stories, anecdotes, memories and magic moments, woven together to provide a storied account of events (empirical, methodological and theoretical) occurring as part of, or related to, my doctoral research. These have been creatively interpreted and presented as a conversation in which we jointly explore the significance of this in relation to understanding young people’s relationship with nature. My stories have been creatively written, using everyday language and present tense – what could be termed a ‘lexicon of practice’. Using present tense makes the scene immediate and invites participation, as the reader (listener) is invited to share the moment. This cannot so easily happen if the account is written in past tense, as something that has already happened/occurred – the moment has gone, the story has moved on. It is now time for this conversation to move on. I hope that you have enjoyed and

learned from reading this, from joining me to ‘rootle in the earth’ and explore this topic.<sup>118</sup>

### **My Post-doctoral plans**

- To publish a co-ethnography of teaching auto/ethnography to undergraduate students, providing them with a more creative and applied way of conducting an undergraduate research study. This work commenced in September 2016 and is undertaken with Dr Julie Taylor.
- To contribute to the revalidation of BA Working with Children and Families to incorporate Creativity, Playfulness, and Outdoor Learning.
- To continue with research into supporting family learning in a range of contexts – from secure settings (prisons) to open, public spaces with the aim of developing a toolkit for practitioners based on this.
- To co-edit a special edition of a journal on Playfulness and Creativity in Outdoor Learning, based on two sessions convened at RGS-IBG 2016 and sessions planned for 2017.<sup>119</sup>
- To develop a ‘calendar’ of stories, drawing from applied anthrozoology of human-nonhuman interactions, written from the perspective of animals with whom humans have a ‘troubled’ relationship (for example, great crested newts; rodents; bugs; spiders; bats; slugs).
- To further develop my creative writing/story-telling skills – to research and write a creative nonfiction account of encountering wolves in the wild.

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<sup>118</sup> Jo Shapcott, 2010; cited in Part One: Introduction, p.1.

<sup>119</sup> As suggested by Professor Chris Philo, who has offered his support with this.

- To keep writing stories and papers for publication with the magic moments from this research that have so far not been publicly shared.

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In my welcome, I promised I would provide suggestions to lead the reader back out of this conversation. I do this in two ways: first, by inviting you to join me in my post-doctoral plans (outlined above), and second, by sharing some ideas for others who may be interested in navigating the Practice-Research-Pedagogy Nexus.

My three top tips for others taking this approach:

- Be open to others' contributions to your work – not easy when we are encouraged to measure and record our individual impact.
- Think about how you can teach/inform others about your work as you undertake it – this can help address the 'so what' question of research.
- Look for opportunities to be strategic with your time – for example, participating in seminars and workshops, helped me to think about how I could explain the papers and toolkit within my overall thesis.

I bring Part Three to a close, by sharing with you, a poem that was shared with me and fellow delegates at a conference in Oxford in July 2016. This conference proved to be yet another pivotal moment for me, as I discovered that I was part of a 'tribe' of storytellers from across the world, who use story to make sense of their experiences and to record their lives. This recognition has provided me with the focus and inspiration for future research and collaborations, whereby I take my

learning from this project forward, in to new and exciting areas of work. Thank you to Paulette Stevens for emailing this to me after the conference, she cites it as:  
From the Elders of the Hopi Nation, Oraibi, Arizona – June 8, 2000.

TO MY FELLOW SWIMMERS  
Here is a river flowing now very fast.  
It is so great and swift that there are those  
Who will be afraid, who will try  
To hold on to the shore.  
They are being torn apart  
And will suffer greatly.  
Know that the river has its destination.  
The elders say we must let go of the shore,  
Push off into the middle of the river,  
And keep our heads above water.  
And I say see who is there with you  
And celebrate.  
At this time in history,  
We are to take nothing personally,  
Least of all ourselves,  
For the moment we do,  
Our spiritual growth and journey come to a halt.  
**The time of the lone wolf is over.**  
Gather yourselves.  
Banish the word struggle from your attitude  
And vocabulary.  
All that we do now must be done  
In a sacred manner and in celebration,  
For we are the ones we have been waiting for.

***The time of the lone wolf is over*** – I have emphasised this line in the poem as it deeply resonated with me, echoing my experiences documented in Chapter 5 and reminding me that research can be transformational, when we allow ourselves to be part of the process. I end my thesis, as promised with my final question:

*How do you make sense of nature?*

## **Post Script**

Christmas 2016 was rapidly approaching as I wrote the final sections of my thesis. I received an email from one of the organisations for whom I volunteer to alert me Father Christmas did not have an Elf to help him and asking if I was available. I switched off my computer, put down my books, donned an elfish costume and went outside to play. During the day, one conversation sparked another magic moment which I feel the need to share – one last Tale.

### **All I want for Christmas is a Cold Bear**

“Hello”, I call out, “I’m looking for three children who have come to see Father Christmas. Their names are Ben, Alice and Rose.<sup>120</sup> Are you in here?” I look around the drawing room, where several families have gathered to make simple Christmas crafts. “We’re here,” comes a reply, as a family of five come towards me. “Are you excited about seeing Father Christmas?” The eldest child shrugs, her brother nods and the smallest one plods silently behind. She’s clutching a small toy rabbit in her hands and carefully watching her feet as she walks. “Come with me,” I continue, “he’s expecting you.”

We enter the small, old building that has been transformed into a magical wonderland of a grotto. Fairy lights are strung across the beams, which have been festooned with seasonal greenery. Much care has been taken to create Santa’s home – his slippers are warming by the fire, frames hold photos of his favourite reindeer, and there are cards from his friends (one says with love from Big Foot). His washing, including spotted underpants, is hanging on a line in the corner of the room, near a map showing the direction he’ll soon be travelling.

“Ho ho ho, how lovely to see you,” he greets the family, “Come on in and sit by the fire.” Three chairs have been placed ready: one big chair and one small chair that rock, and one middle-size chair with a comfy cushion. The children take their places, and I’m reminded of the three little bears from

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<sup>120</sup> Names have been changed to respect privacy and confidentiality.

the Goldilocks Tale. Father Christmas asks lots of questions, and tells them tales about their parents when they were little children – mummy had smelly feet and daddy snored. The children laugh, their parents join in. He rocks in his chair, getting them to join in on theirs, showing them what it is like to ride on his sleigh.

Then comes the BIG question, “So have you sent me a letter, have you told me what you want for Christmas?” The older two say yes, and point out that their sister can’t yet write, she is too young, she’s only two. Father Christmas looks at her and asks more gently, “and what, little Rose, do you want me to bring?” Gazing up at him she says, “I want a cold bear.” Father Christmas is struggling to hear her little voice. She repeats it again, “I want a cold bear”. Her father catches my attention, silently mouthing above her head, “a POLAR bear.” Ah... I melt a little inside. I too want to call them cold bears. There is so much more feeling in that word. Cold is more understandable to a child than ‘polar’.

The day ends. We tidy up and return home. Rose’s words linger in my mind. I recall a time, many years ago, when I went on a school trip to a museum and encountered a Dodo for the very first time. I was captivated by its awkward shape, stumpy yellow legs and clump of feathers for a tail. As a shy, clumsy child, I felt an affinity with this strange creature: a bird that couldn’t fly, that others thought weird or crazy. It is a fascination that has never left me. I’ve read about them in books, looked at them in other museums, studied them in university modules: ‘So awesome. Yet so extinct’.<sup>121</sup> And I cannot help but be concerned that the cold bear will share a similar fate, as the world becomes too warm - that one day, many years ahead, a small child, like Rose, will visit a virtual museum and say, “What a funny looking bear, were they real or just in stories?”

My wish, for more than Christmas, is for us to find a way to conserve the cold bears of this world. As David Attenborough so powerfully reminds us: ‘...how easy it is for us to lose our connection with the natural world [...] It is, surely, our responsibility to do everything within our power to create a planet that provides a home not just for us, but for all life on Earth’.<sup>122</sup> This study has ended. My work continues.

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<sup>121</sup> Source of information on the Dodo, URL: <http://www.dodobird.net/> Last Viewed 19/12/2016

<sup>122</sup> ‘Cities’ (2016) *Planet Earth II*, episode 6/6. BBC One Television, 11 December.



# APPENDICES

## Appendix i: My I-poem

**Making SenSE of nature: my I Poem**

### **For as long as I can remember**

For as long as I can remember, I have felt strong, spiritual connection  
my early childhood with my twin sister  
my role as a parent, encouraging my children to play outdoors  
I have instinctively turned to nature, I have encouraged others  
I love the feel of the sun on my body, the wind in my hair  
I love the smell of chainsaw oil, working with others  
allowed to be 'one of the boys'  
I was encouraged to be a girl, be ladylike (where's your modesty?)  
I did not really challenge this thinking  
I wonder what happened, did I change, was this always inside me  
I find the outdoors spiritual, inspiring, I am in awe of it  
I am also scared of it, hill can seem too high for me  
a river too wide for me to cross  
I am a natural scientist, yet I find it difficult to believe evolution  
I feel uncomfortable with religion, I am happiest when I am allowed to just be  
I cannot fully comprehend, or understand, I want to accept this  
I do not have to understand, I feel at peace with this,  
I feel, I can tune in to the natural rhythms  
I want to take a break, use of all my senses, my emotions, take it right into my 'soul'  
the centre of my being, my well-being, I describe it as the glue that binds me  
supports me to connect with my external surroundings  
my spirit is like the sap in a tree, my lifeblood  
my emotions inextricably connected, my senses, to my spirit  
the words I use, label my feelings, explain them to others  
outdoors I feel happy, I can see sky  
my relationships with others, intertwined with my relationship with nature  
freedom as a young child, my adolescence, predominantly indoors  
relishing opportunities to run wild, always with someone, too scared to go alone  
I believed I loved walking, I found out my way of walking wasn't 'proper'  
my approach more gentle, friend who became my husband, helped me to navigate  
helped me to see that I can, I still feel inadequate, I haven't had opportunities  
I have nurtured four children, instilled in them a love of being outdoors  
I have inspired others, my work continues

**Tracy Hayes 27<sup>th</sup> March 2013**

**[Written on my 46<sup>th</sup> Birthday]**

## Appendix ii: Conference Abstract 'Methodological Mud-wrestling'

### Methodological Mud Wrestling

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"Where are you going?" I called, as my husband veered off in the other direction. "Avoiding the mud" came his reply. Squelch! I looked down as my feet sank. Seems he had taken the sensible approach to our walk, whilst I once again found myself ankle deep in sludge. Wrestling myself free, I determinedly forged ahead through the mud to rejoin my husband as our paths converged once more on drier land. "What a wonderful metaphor for my research!" I proclaimed to him. There was no need for words; his face said it all 'Here we go again!'

My husband is a natural scientist, an ecologist with a positivist approach to research; he professes bewilderment at my perpetual battles with epistemology and ontology, yet patiently listens as I attempt to explain my predicament to him. I used to be like him: I started my academic life within natural science and was successful at this. It has taken me longer to get to grips with the social side of science – it is so much more complicated, with so many decisions to make. Methodology is a critical component of research. So how do I make it work for me? Am I interpreting or constructing? Is it realism or relativism? Can I be pragmatic about real world research? How on earth do I choose between ethnography and phenomenology – one is slightly easier to pronounce and less likely to induce a 'Muppet moment'! Is that a valid and reliable research decision?

What about action research? I like the sound of that – it sounds like actually *doing* something real and implies a purpose and reason for my research. Can I combine that with ethnography? Yes, Ethnographic Action Research and the acronym is EAR – I really like that, it combines well with using the Listening Guide for analysis and with my focus on 'voice'. Feel I'm making progress here. Now it is time to add some participants to the mix. I am interested in the views of young people, what they think about outdoor experiences. However to gain a full understanding I also need to talk with the practitioners who facilitate these experiences: the two strands of voices need to be entwined somehow. Then there's me: where do I fit in all this? I was a young person, and I loved being outside. As a parent and a practitioner, I have continued to love being outside. Now I'm a researcher – is it different? Hmmm...a third strand to weave in, and something else to ponder and explore.

Splash! Squish! Lost in thought I had walked straight into a muddy puddle. "That's a deep one," my husband laughed, "You really should look where you are going!" I grinned back at him and replied "the story of my life, eh?" My desire to focus on the voice of young people has come close to miring me in the methodological mud: which young people do I talk with? It would be very easy to talk to those in school, or college or university: the articulate, eloquent ones, with well developed opinions and an informed approach to the subject. Why doesn't that appeal to me? Why do I instead feel the need to seek out the more 'hidden', quieter ones, those silenced by more conventional research? My perversity brings a number of challenges and ethical dilemmas: for example, how do I 'hear' the voice of those who are unable to talk? A valiant search through the literature looking for answers; none seem to fit. I am just going to have to trust my instinct, stay vigilant and true to my values as a youth worker. Talking to others may help; perhaps we can explore the challenges together.

The literature provides the academic voices that form a strengthening thread (the warp), the foundational structure for the three strands (the weft) that interlace with the warp to form the weave of my research. One year in to my PhD research and I'm beginning to feel like more like a carpet weaver than a researcher! And yet I need to find a way of explaining this in a way that recognises that the process is as important as the destination. It is necessary to record and explain my decisions, the choices I have made, the metaphorical places I have been. I need to show the trail of footprints on my research carpet: something that is so much easier when my feet are covered in mud!

©Tracy Hayes, February 2014

### Appendix iii: Practitioner Toolkit CPD report

The aim of this session was to launch Plantlife's new guide to supporting Young People with SEN/D to discover the Outdoors. It was held on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2016 at Landlife National Wildflower Centre, Court Hey Park, Liverpool.

The session was attended by 9 participants and co-delivered by Tracy Hayes, University of Cumbria and Anne Faulkner, the former Plantlife Project Officer. The day started with a simple activity to draw boggarts (samples below), which proved to be an effective way of getting to know each other and introducing the topic for the day.

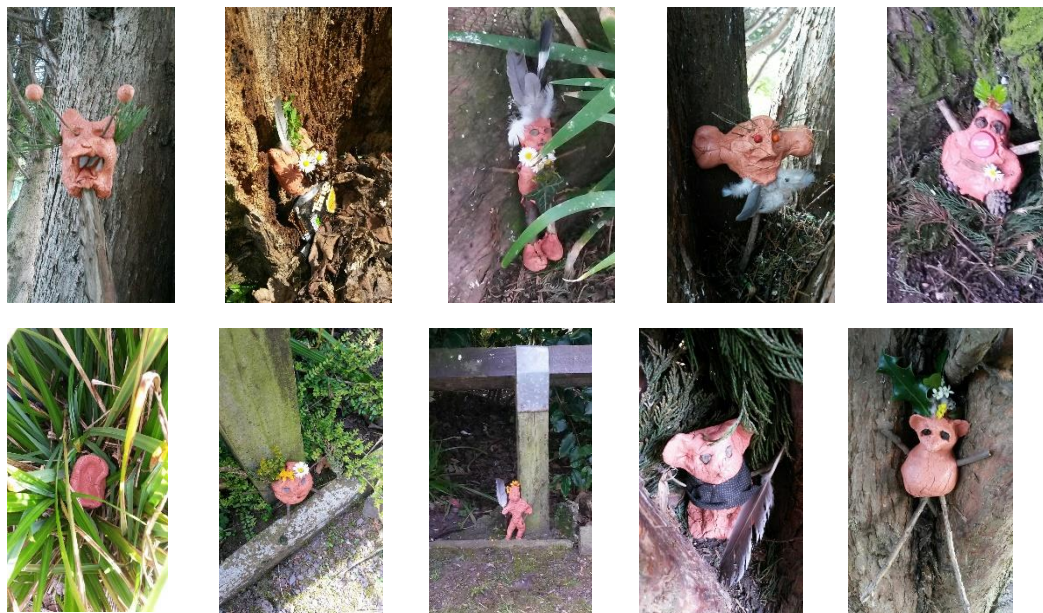


The second activity involved considering our expectations for the workshop, summarised below:

What do we want to achieve from the workshop?	<p>"New ideas for practical sessions with SEN young people."</p> <p>"Practical ideas for adapting activities."</p> <p>"New ideas. Kindred spirit."</p> <p>"Learn from others' experience."</p> <p>"Ideas for activities."</p> <p>"Sharing skills, knowledge, practice, stories."</p> <p>"How to break down various barriers so that <u>anyone</u> can experience and appreciate the outdoors."</p> <p>"Achieve: Learn from others' experiences."</p> <p>"Knowledge and skills that allow me to include those with SEND appropriately."</p> <p>"How can I keep them <u>all</u> engaged."</p>
What worries us about the workshop?	<p>"Stay away from stereotypes."</p> <p>"Knowing a lot less than everyone else."</p> <p>"Making sure not to patronize people."</p>
In relation to supporting Young People with SEN/D to discover the Outdoors I need to know...	<p>"Better ways to communicate, help them understand."</p> <p>"Boundaries!?"</p> <p>"Practical ideas / advice for activities."</p> <p>"Resources, sources of materials."</p> <p>"What they would like to get out of the experience."</p> <p>"Do they have a key worker? Their parent(s)/carer; Something about their learning difficulties and needs; what do they already enjoy doing?"</p> <p>"Individuals needs and desired outcomes."</p> <p>"How to encourage teachers, specialists, supporters that it is</p>

	<p>important.”</p> <p>“What additional needs – learning, emotional or physical the young person may have?”</p> <p>“The regulations (unfortunately)”</p> <p>“If the weather turns?”</p> <p>“Creative ways to help them learn about the outdoors.”</p>
<p>In relation to supporting Young People with SEN/D to discover the Outdoors I can offer...</p>	<p>“Antidote to stress.”</p> <p>“Connection with nature.”</p> <p>“Many cool and thoughtful things.”</p> <p>“A welcoming, inclusive setting; a natural, outdoor setting.”</p> <p>“Re-assurance. Positive.”</p> <p>“Enthusiasm ☺ ”</p> <p>“Offer inclusion, not expertise.”</p> <p>“Outdoor activities: archery, orienteering, team games, etc.”</p> <p>“I have a lot of experience of working with vulnerable adults and young people; but no/little experience of working with them outdoors.”</p> <p>“Increasing their confidence and inspiring them about the outdoors.”</p>

Following an introduction to the toolkit and discussion about its purpose, and design, we headed outside to explore the local park by making use of some simple activities: make a clay Boggart using the clay provided, with items found in the park, then to find it a home. As a group, we decided to leave the Boggarts in their new homes (samples below), so that others would find them over the next few days. As they are made of natural materials they will decompose without leaving a trace.



We returned to the classroom and completed the final part of the planned session, which was to review and apply the toolkit to our own experiences. This generated some lively discussions, including coping with challenging behaviour, that could have continued much longer than the planned time allowed.

As a final activity, participants were asked to share their magic moments and/or memory from the day by considering the question “what have we learnt?”, writing this on a card and posting it into the magic moment box.

- Allowing enough time for those with SEND to be in outdoor space.
- We left the boggart outside...we left it for others to see, experience and enjoy...that's great, but so new to me!
- Finding a piece of cloth on the grass that became a shawl for my Boggart! (And accidentally dropping my cake into my coffee).
- Being able to 'lose' myself, picking flowers, finding feathers, etc., etc. – I'm at my happiest when I'm foraging.
- Hearing other people's thoughts on the topics we discussed and having such common ground/thinking.
- Just having the time and space to BE outside (in the sun). Thanks for a very enjoyable morning!
- I've not made a Boggart before, so this was very special.
- Boggarts activity is very adaptable – looking forward to trying it out.

Overall this proved to be a very effective, and enjoyable session. Participants were reluctant to leave, and told us that they would have like the session to be longer, to allow for further discussions and to try out some other activities. They requested a copy of the toolkit once it has been finished, and asked us to share email addresses so that they could keep in touch with each other.

## **Appendix iv: Achievements and Outputs**

### **Academic achievements**

June 2016: Recipient of the 2016 Vice-Chancellor's Award for Early Career Research Excellence

June 2015: Awarded the Reflective Essay Postgraduate Prize for 2015 by The Higher Education Research Group (HERG) in association with the RGS-IBG annual international conference.

### **Academic Outputs**

#### ***Peer Review Journals***

Hayes, T.A. (2016) Book Review of 'Informal Education, Childhood and Youth: Geographies, Histories, Practices' by Peter Kraftl and Sarah Mills (Eds.) (2014). *Children's Geographies*, 14 (3)

#### ***Published conference proceedings***

Hayes, T.A. (2014) 'The challenges of social inclusion in outdoor education: Can tortoise and hare learn together?' *Being there: Slow, fast, traditional, wild, urban, natural...* Proceedings from the 2nd International Adventure Conference, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, Skye, May 2013. Edited by Dr Peter Varley and Dr Steve Taylor. Fort William: University of the Highlands and Islands. pp.43-54

Hayes, T.A. (2013) 'The Accidental Youthworker', *Outdoor Learning as a means of promoting healthy and sustainable lifestyles and social inclusion for young people*, EUROPEAN OUTDOOR LEARNING SEMINAR, Derwent Hill, 26th – 30th October 2012, Edited by Barbara Humberstone Available at <http://www.eoe-network.eu/conferences/>

#### **Book chapters**

Hayes, T.A. (2016) 'Kindness: caring for self, others and nature - who cares and why?', in Horton, J. and Pyer, M. (eds) *Children, young people and care*. London: Taylor Francis.

Hayes T (2016) 'A playful approach to outdoor learning: Boggarts, Bears and Bunny Rabbits!', in Horton, J. and Evans, B. (eds.) *Play, Recreation, Health and Well Being*, Vol.9 of Skelton, T. (ed.) *Geographies of Children and Young People*. Springer, Singapore.

#### **Conference Presentations**

Hayes, T.A. (2017) 'Playing with Words... Making Stories'. 20th IPA Triennial World Conference, theme: Learning and Development. 13-16th September 2017, Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

Hayes, T.A. and Atmakur, S. (2017) Co-convener/chair of GCYFRG sponsored session: 'Playing, listening, engaging and taking action with children'. RGS-IBG 2017 International AGM & conference, August – September 2017.

Hayes, T.A. (2017) 'Thesis in a box', University of Cumbria Doctoral Colloquium, Lancaster, 13th July 2017. (Unpublished)



Hayes, T.A. (2017) 'Sustainable Solace'. Cumbria Research and Innovation Conference 2017: Achievement, Impact and Potential. University of Cumbria, Lancaster, 7th July 2017. (Unpublished)

Prince, H. and Hayes, T. (2017) 'Evidencing atmospheres and narratives: measuring the immeasurable?' In: European Institute for Outdoor Adventure Education and Experiential Learning (EOE) International Seminar, 28 June - 2 July 2017, University of St Mark and St John, Plymouth, UK. (Unpublished)

Collins, D. and Hayes, T. (2017) 'A Playful Approach - Want to go on a Boggart Hunt?'. Workshop in European Institute for Outdoor Adventure Education and Experiential Learning (EOE) International Seminar, 28 June - 2 July 2017, University of St Mark and St John, Plymouth, UK. (Unpublished)

Hayes, T.A. (2017) 'Research Adventures with my Bear'. In: European Institute for Outdoor Adventure Education and Experiential Learning (EOE) International Seminar, 28 June - 2 July 2017, University of St Mark and St John, Plymouth, UK. (Unpublished)

Hayes, T.A. (2017) 'Reluctant Readers'. Student Success: Adding Value through 'Learning Gain', Learning and Teaching Fest, 20th June 2017, University of Cumbria, Carlisle. (Unpublished)

Hayes, T.A. (2017) and students. 'Applying and Enhancing Learning: Volunteering with the National Trust'. Applied Psychology & WCF Staff-Student Conference. 28th April 2017, University of Cumbria, Carlisle. (Unpublished)

Hayes, T.A. and Larmour, C. (2017) 'Family Learning in Prisons'. Applied Psychology & WCF Staff-Student Conference. 28th April 2017, University of Cumbria, Carlisle. (Unpublished)

August – September RGS-IBG 2016 International AGM and conference – invited participant in one HERG session; co-convened two GCYFRG sponsored sessions:

1. Co-convened with colleague from WCF team, focussed on 'creative and poetic approaches'.
2. Co-convened with colleague from St Mark and St John University, Plymouth; focussed on 'Playful Approaches'. Skills development in organising and promoting conference sessions.

Hayes, T.A. (2016) 'Creative methodology: exploring a shared space as a different place'. *Interdisciplinary research with children, young people and families: crossing boundaries, sharing stories*. Wednesday 7th September 2016, University of Northampton, UK.

Hayes, T.A. (2016) 'Sharing stories: an interactive, interdisciplinary approach to pedagogy and research', *Storytelling: Global Reflections on Narrative*, 9th Global Meeting, Sunday 10th July – Tuesday 12th July 2016, Mansfield College, Oxford,

Hayes, T.A. (2016) Participated in one-day Workshop: *Getting Your Message Across: Storytelling for Researchers and Other Professionals*. Inter-Disciplinary.Net: A Global Network for Dynamic Research and Publishing, Wednesday 1st July, Mansfield College, Oxford, United Kingdom.

Hayes, T.A. (2015) 'A playful approach to learning outdoors'. Unpublished oral presentation at *BERA Annual Conference*, September 15-17, 2015, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

Hayes, T.A. (2015) 'Shared story approaches: you tell me yours, and I'll tell you mine...' Invited workshop presentation. *The Great Outdoors? Children, Young People and Families in Natural and Rural Spaces*, Centre for Children and Youth and Institute of Health and Well-being, University of Northampton, September 9-10, 2015, Northampton, UK.

Hayes, T.A. and Larmour, C. (2015) 'That's not MY Gruffalo'. Royal Geographical Society (RGS) with Institute of British Geographers (IBG) Annual International Conference, *Children and Nature in the Anthropocene*. Presented in Session 3: 'Impacts of children, families and young people connecting with nature'. September 2-4, 2015, Exeter, UK

Hayes, T.A. (2015) 'It's not easy being ME.' Tuesday 9 and Wednesday 10 June 2015: York St John Value and Virtue Conference.

Hayes, T.A. (2015) 'Developing an academic identity - It's not easy being ME!' 19th May 2015: *BSA Postgraduate Event at the University of Leicester: Emotional Methodologies*. First presentation of this paper, subsequently refined and presented in June at York St John. <http://emotionalmethodologies.weebly.com/>

Hayes, T.A. (2004) 'My Perfect Place? I would go where the moon is rising, just sit there and look at the surroundings [updated version based on feedback from presentation in Iceland]'. *Flying on the Ground Conference*, Brathay Trust, Ambleside. October 2014.

Hayes, T.A. (2014) 'My Perfect Place? I would go where the moon is rising, just sit there and look at the surroundings'. *Under the open sky: Supporting young people's Well-being through outdoor experiences in formal and non-formal education - European perspectives*, Association of Nature and Outdoor schools in partnership with the European Institute for Outdoor Adventure Education and Experiential Learning (EOE) 3th - 7th September 2014, Laugar í Sælingsdal, Iceland

Hayes, T.A. (2014) 'Boggarts, Bears and Bunny Rabbits!' RGS-IBG Annual International Conference 2014, *Geographies of Youthwork – Children and young people's popular cultures, identities, and subcultures*. Session convenors: John Horton and Peter Kraftl. London, August 2014.

Hayes, T.A. (2014) 'Methodological Mud Wrestling!' Abstract for York St John University Conference 2014, Theme: 'Openness and Criticality: evaluating and publishing our research'. York, July 2014.

Hayes, T.A. (2014) 'Hunting for Treasure' Abstract for *University of Cumbria Doctoral Colloquium*, Lancaster, July 2014.

Hayes, T.A. (2014) 'Let's Play! Playfulness for Grown-ups' Abstract for *IOL North West Conference*, Dallam Outdoors, Dallam School, Milnthorpe, Friday 24th January 2014

Hayes, T.A. (2013) 'Natural Youthwork: the connected way!' Abstract for *RGS-IBG Annual International Conference 2013*, Geographies of Youthwork, London, August 2013

Hayes, T.A. (2013) 'Whose Story? We create stories and change the details to engage our audience...but whose story is it really?' Abstract for *Lancaster University Postgraduate Research Conference 2013*, Theme of conference: *Creation and Change*, Lancaster, July 2013

Hayes, T.A. (2013) 'Stories for well-being: are you sitting comfortably? Then we can begin...' Abstract for *Brathay Trust and University of Cumbria Well-being Conference*, Ambleside, Cumbria, July 2013

Hayes, T.A. (2013) 'The challenges of social inclusion in outdoor education: can tortoise and hare learn together'. Abstract for *Adventure Conference*, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, Skye, May 2013

Shaughnessy, J. and Hayes, T. (2012). 'Our words, our voices please listen: Pilot project tracking young people's learning journeys on an Alternative Education Programme'. Working paper presented at *You Gov Children and Young People's Conference*, 22nd November at the Arlington Conference Centre, London.



### **Poster presentations**

Hayes, T.A. (2017) 'First-hand Experience of Nature: Dancing on the Palm of a Hand'. 20th IPA Triennial World Conference, theme: Learning and Development. 13-16th September 2017, Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

Hayes, T.A. (2017) 'Playing along with Children & Young People, in and with Nature'. 20th IPA Triennial World Conference, theme: Learning and Development. 13-16th September 2017, Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

Hayes, T.A. (2015) "A creative exploration of young people's relationship with nature" – *Doctoral Colloquium* (July) and *Manchester Metropolitan University Postgraduate Research Conference* (November)

Hayes, T.A. (2014) 'Whose Voice? Making sense of nature from young people's perspectives' Poster presentation, *University of Cumbria Doctoral Colloquium*, Lancaster, July 2014

Hayes, T.A. (2013) 'Whose Voice? Making sense of nature from young people's stories' Poster presentation, *Brathay Trust and University of Cumbria Well-being Conference*, July 2013

Hayes, T.A. (2013) 'Whose Voice? Making sense of nature from young people's stories' Poster presentation, *Creation and Change, Lancaster University Postgraduate Research Conference 2013*, Lancaster, July 2013

Hayes, T.A. (2013) 'Making SenSE of Nature: exploring sensory, spiritual and emotional connections with the Natural Environment' Poster presentation, *University of Cumbria Doctoral Colloquium*, Lancaster, July 2013

### **Practitioner journal**

Hayes, T.A. (2013) 'Seeing the world through their eyes. Learning from a 5 ½ year old, a rabbit and a boat ride with aunty'. *Horizons* 63. pp.36-39

### **Public engagement**

Hayes, Tracy (2016) 'Why I Volunteer.' *From You, column, National Trust Members' Magazine*. Swindon: National Trust

Hayes, Tracy (2016) 'Kids need to fall over. That's part of being alive.' Interviewed by Jessica Moore. *i newspaper, Postgrad Diary*. 24 March 2016

Hayes, Tracy (2014) 'I spy with my little eye...something beginning with 'W' 'S'...' Windermere Reflections public talk, Ambleside, May 2014

### **Some of my relevant non-academic achievements**

- May 2016: I was painted by Freya Pocklington as part of her project 'Women's Work', resulting from a three-month Dorothy Una Radcliffe Fellowship in Spring 2016. The 2016 Fellowship is part of the National Trust's programme of activities celebrating 150 years since Beatrix Potter's birth. This was on public display from 2nd September to 27th November 2016, with an audio recording of me reading a story and links to my research.
- December 2015: I was commissioned by one of the organisations that participated in my research, to develop a toolkit, titled 'We're ALL in the Wild. An inclusive guide to supporting young people with SEN/D to discover their local outdoor spaces'. This

has the purpose of supporting practitioners with their continuing professional development (CPD).

- In 2008, I wrote an article for Exchange the newsletter of NCVYS (National Council for Voluntary Youth Services) promoting environmental youth volunteering. Within my role as Youth Project Officer for The Wildlife Trusts, I also helped organise their conference and AGM – their first to have an environmental theme.
- In 2007/8, I was recorded as one of the participants in an oral history project 'Natural Heroes: Voices from Natural Historians of Leicestershire and Rutland' produced by Leicestershire County Council.
- I was the East Midlands Mentor for the Green Prints Environmental volunteering programme, and volunteer youth worker on the Green Prints Flagship Project: Birds need Friends in Bosworth.
- I developed and managed the Teen Ranger Project on behalf of Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust, with support from Leicestershire County Council and funding from Heritage Lottery Fund Young Roots.
- In July 2003, I was awarded an Amerada Hess Fellowship Award for Educators to participate on an Earthwatch project in South Devon, Butterflies and Bushcrickets: one of only 30 awarded in the UK for 2003.

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<sup>i</sup> The word count excludes reference lists for individual papers, the consolidated bibliography, abstract, contents lists and acknowledgements. The word breakdown is itemised below.

<b>word count</b>		<b>incl footnotes &amp; endnotes</b>	
<b>Section</b>	<b>excl ref list</b>	<b>ref list</b>	<b>total</b>
welcome	617	79	696
chapter 1	7614	494	8108
chapter 2	4704	n/a	4704
chapter 3	12227	219	12446
chapter 4	7070	1189	8259
chapter 5	3435	1128	4563
chapter 6	1587	132	1719
chapter 7	4903	526	5429
chapter 8	7818	1106	8924
chapter 9	8063	1256	9319
chapter 10	1352	0	1352
chapter 11	376	0	376
Part 3 chapters 12, 13, 14	15154	0	15154
postscript	815	0	815
appendices	2607	n/a	2607
	<b>78342</b>	<b>6129</b>	<b>84471</b>
Consolidated Bibliography		<b>5278</b>	
<b>Toolkit</b>	<b>not for examination</b>		